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# FALSE GODDESSES





# FALSE GODDESSES

By

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BOOK I

OVERTURE

“THE BEAUTY-PARLOUR”

MUSICAL EXTRAVAGANZA

Production by

MARX OÖLERMANN

Featuring

Miss AUBREY PROVOST

Book by WALLACE TAVERNER. Lyrics by TRENT COPELAND.

Music by KRANZ and d'ALVAREZ.

Staged by TANNER DREXEL. Dances by L. E. PIROTTI.

Costumes by GUILLAUME. Hats by DESIRÉE.

Boots and Shoes by DANTRY. Wigs by CASTELLANO.

Musical Director, VITTOR d'ALVAREZ.

Chief Electrician, A. E. JONES.

Box Office (Mr. TEMPLE), 10 to 10.

ALL this assorted information reared majestically about town on vast hoardings. Mr. Oölermann had brought yet another success to New York. Could you have found time to visit the show itself, you would have discovered that this redundancy of posterred details by no means exhausted the list, for the programme carried on the good work omitted by the

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placards. The minor artists were variously "submitted," "offered," or "presented." The upholstery throughout, cigarettes used, pianos, acoustics, refreshments, special matinée teas, printing and disinfectants were lightly touched upon, to say nothing of the printed words of the great hit of the production, allotted of course to Miss Aubrey Provost. Rumour had it that lady wished to omit it at matinées owing to the dearth of business men.

*"Won't you come and kiss me?"*

*"I'm waiting here!"*

*"You really cannot miss me*

*"The gangway's clear,*

*"Now all you have to do*

*"Is come on two and two*

*"Just forget your wives*

*"And have the time of your lives!"*

*"Won't you come and kiss me?"*

*"Now don't be shy!"*

*"It so easy when you've had one try,*

*"Come and say 'ta-ta'"*

*"To a little shooting star,*

*"Come on boys and kiss me on the—sly!"*

This invitation offered, amid subdued titters of anticipation, the house would be plunged in darkness, a white screen lowered and the words bioscoped upon it while the invitation was presumably being taken advantage of; then up would go the lights and screen to reveal the singer sitting demurely in the centre of the stage nursing a large baby-doll.

Quick work—even for America! This number always went big.

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And in the hall-bedroom of a semi-theatrical boarding-house, two privates in Oëlermann's army sat up in bed eating their breakfast and reading their mail ; (breakfast in bed was 10 cents extra, but they treated themselves to it in honour of fetching up again in New York after weeks on the road.)

Even tumbled and drowsy from sleep they presented a marked contrast, for Mary Stella Conder was, in addition to being a striking type, far more refined in voice, habits, and features than was her companion, Ethel Brail, who, pretty enough in a somewhat obvious, golden-hair'd way, was distinctly of the *bourgeoisie*. Mary too was taller than the other, who, owing to her lack of inches, was permanently relegated to the ranks of dancers. Her yellow hair lacked the unsubtle gloss of Ethel's own ; her square rather beautiful mouth was cut on petulant lines, and her eyes were clear and grey and utterly opposed to the more useful bright blue of her friend.

Mary had willingly drifted to New York in an English opera company, playing small parts, a few years before, and when the American trip was concluded and the company about to return to England, had instantly decided to remain behind. She was always sure of some kind of a job with her voice, figure and appearance, and, better still, of keeping herself when out of one on her minute income, which came to her on the death of her parents who would have

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been actively inimical to this mode of life. They had only permitted their child lessons with the best teachers under pressure.

Mary's father had been an authority on colour-prints, and her mother "county," but in such reduced circumstances that she found herself almost penniless in the very early twenties. She had, thanks to her satisfactory connections, been offered the post of secretary-feed-the-parrot companion to a certain acid old dame of title living grimly in the Midlands, surrounded with priceless *objets d'art* and far too many men-servants. It was while good-looking Stuart Conder was dispatched to Wykham Holt by his firm to value certain prints, and to treat if possible for a certain Bartolozzi, that he had met his pretty wife, whose spirit was not yet quenched by her environment.

And now their only child sat up in the tumbled bed of a cheap American boarding-house, in a slightly soiled wrapper, and partook of breakfast in company with the not-very-remote descendant of a plumber. Later in the day she would—still in the same company—board a car to an enormous theatre where she would display herself in several giddily conflicting changes of costume.

Of the entire company they were the only English girls. Ethel's real name happened to be Bounce. Concealing this skeleton-in-the-cupboard from the dressing-room took her all her time. But in spite of her elaborate and

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pathetic precautions, Nemesis descended in the form of a letter from her brother in England. Commonplace, unimaginative, and very much the married man, he had from the first obstinately refused to recognize his young sister under any other name than her own, and had, despite her urgently expressed request that all communications be sent to her at her rooms, written on one occasion a letter which traced its way through the States to the theatre in the town the company was visiting. The result had been immediate and tragic. Ethel, demanding her mail at the stage door, had been informed that there was 'nothing for Miss Brail,' and was no sooner settled in the dressing-room than the call-boy poked his head in, shouting: "Letter for Miss Bounce! Anyone here name o' Bounce." In a flash Ethel decided to give up her letter, preferring its loss and a quiet life, but even as she did some agonized mental-arithmetic the boy clinched the matter by again shouting "Miss Bounce, Miss *Ethel Bounce!*" as he grinned and ducked to avoid a fusillade of powder-puffs. Well, it might be something important—one never knew, so she faintly extended her hand—and endured hades for several weeks. The actual chaffing lasted quite a fortnight, as someone was always ready to stoke the fires when they showed signs of dying out, and when the poor jest was finally in tatters, the company "cats" took it up. From this Mary Conder rescued

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her, made room for her in her own dressing-room, which, being given up to small-part, one-song or understudy girls, was somewhat less crowded. She was unable to stand furtive tears in odd corners of the theatre, and had deliberately taken up the cudgels, praying only for the time when matters would right themselves again. For a little of Ethel, she found, went a very long way, as the latter was given to putting her combings in the slop-pail and tumbling into bed without doing her hair, to say nothing of flicking her cigarette ash in a fine frenzy of emancipation over whatever came handiest. The poor girl was really extremely harmless and good, but the new life and country had gone to her head. It was the cause of acute discomfort to Mary, who felt responsible. Then, too, Ethel had managed to assimilate the theatre slang which she even carried home with her to launch at Mary's head. Her conversation became full of nerve-racking "some shows," "by hecks," and "say kids"; but when she addressed Mary Conder as "say cutie," the latter pulled the preposterous stuffing out of Ethel, who thereafter became comparatively normal in her speech, saving up her finest efforts for the theatre.

By the time the company anchored in New York, the joke perished of inanition, and Ethel returned to her own quarters, her heart full of affection and gratitude for Mary.

Ethel bumped down the tray on a chair



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already heaped with her clothes beside the bed, and began to smoke. She read her solitary letter and yawned.

"Anything amusing?" asked Mary.

"Beastly dull. My brother. He treats me as if I was about two. Pretty fair cheek although of course he's miles older than me."

"He's married isn't he?"

"Lord yes, got two kids already. They're only babies really—the boy's not yet six." Then with a gust of nerves: "Oh I wish to *heavens* he wouldn't call me Bounce! I should've thought it was best kept dark as a name, but he seems to enjoy shouting it out all over the shop and making me look a fool. I suppose he doesn't like the idea of 'aunty' being on the stage." She banged her head back against the pillow.

"Do you like his wife?" Mary diverted the conversation.

"Oh yes. She's a good soul. If ever you go over again you must look 'em all up. She's one of your mother-and-home sort—miles too good for James," she added viciously.

But once inside the theatre Mary's self-imposed duty to Ethel ceased, and she was free to be with Jasmine.

They had wasted little time, these two, in any cautious fencing, which will only admit to intimacy after months, during which time each is *en garde*. They had looked at each other and known from the first. Mary, two years

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older than Jasmine, was yet willingly under the dominion of the other and would have admitted it quite openly, with a happy laugh. But she also knew that she was in safe hands.

Jasmine Shelley was a tall young woman of possibly twenty-five years, and as she had been on the road in a one-song capacity with the company since its beginnings, she had been promoted when the show arrived in New York—having been tried on the dog and found acceptable by that chancy animal—to another song, a mode of reward not much in vogue with the Oëlermann management, which, in common with some of its English *confrères*, preferred on coming to town to scrap those battered by the tour and replace with fresh urban beauty.

Jasmine Shelley was still in the chorus, still stood with the massed crowd of ornamental cowgirls in the great Prairie scene, but—she wore a blue shirt instead of a scarlet one as did the others.

She had married young Garth van Osten several years before, and the reckless experiment had been an unusually happy one. Garth was rapidly coming to the front as a reliable *jeune premier*, and his business qualities, looks, manner and brains had quickly left a gap in the chorus in which he once had pranced together with many other young men, browned to spurious health and with eyelids brightly blue.

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Femininely stepping in the *ensembles*, prancing in their frock-coats and glistening top-hats, they were a perennial joke to Jasmine and Garth. But in the see-saw of theatrical life it was pure chance if they played in the same town, let alone in the same company, Garth being increasingly sure of New York engagements, while Jasmine had, in common with hosts of her sister artists, to take what came along.

They had one child, a little girl, and in the early days, when rapid decision and movement were imperative, she was something of a problem to the young parents. During the first years of her life little Babs van Osten found a home with Jasmine's mother, and upon her return from the tour of the States and her establishment in New York, Jasmine reft her daughter from Mrs. Shelley's unwilling hands and placed her in a tiny Harlem flat under the doting surveillance of a coloured girl from Mrs. Shelley's Virginian homestead.

At this time Garth was about to start out on the road himself in a Broadway success, playing the lead which he had understudied in New York. Jasmine shrugged her shoulders and accepted the situation with her customary frivolous philosophy.

"Seems like we must get divorced," she had once remarked with a twinkle, "at least we sh'd see each othur in the witness box."

It was Jasmine Shelley who, dressed and made up as an ancient and gin-sodden scrub-

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lady, tottered diagonally into the stage manager's private room and picked a raucous quarrel with him then and there, drew a bottle from her frowsy petticoat, drank, brandished it at him, and sank upon the floor with her crêpe bonnet obscuring one eye ; it was Jasmine, absently nibbling at her bunch of mimosa, which later she would throw to the audience at the finale of the Springtime scene, who swallowed a mouthful of mimosa-pills and exploded in a shouting cough which rang through the theatre damaging Miss Provost's top note ; it was Jasmine who worked a prize sell on an English Bishop.

He was their unwilling *vis-à-vis* at *table d'hôte* in the hotel where she and Mary Conder had been obliged to put up owing to lack of professional accommodation in a town which was not broken in to productions of the Oëlermann magnitude. The Bishop, who was accompanied by his unattractive wife, son and daughter, had, upon the girls' arrival, made enquiries at the Bureau and returned to the lounge trembling with offence. Being a person unable to let sleeping dogs lie, he talked "at" the two at meals until Jasmine leant across and told him, among many other things, that personally she herself had never worn a skirt as short as his. "Our legs have to be worth showing." What added fuel to the Bishop's fire was the fact that hitherto the "theatrical persons" had given no loop-hole for definite

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complaint. But Jasmine was getting dangerous. The son—a young man with prominent teeth and fat pink eyes—had seen fit to make elementary advances to her.

The local news rag came out on Saturday, and on that afternoon the Bishop and his wife were to entertain some chance-met friends in their private sitting-room.

In the journal that week appeared an advertisement :—

WANTED for big production :  
Dancers in all styles. Must be young  
and really pretty, or useless. Good  
salary. Rehearse immediately. —  
Apply (with practice skirt) Room 10,  
———— Hotel.

Room 10 was the Bishop's bed-room, and it quickly became infested with girls of every height and type, all made up, all carrying despatch-cases. The manager thought the Bishop's visiting-list an odd one. As the latter failed to come down for his tea, his wife, with apologies to the cathedral-close friends, went up to fetch him—and there was a certain constraint.

On Sunday morning early Jasmine and Mary left to brighten some other town.

Jasmine's song catered for her in no wise, being on the one-little-kiss lines, but her humour got the better of it, and she emphasized the cloying pathos and rendered it like a dirge with her mouth pulled down until—one night somebody laughed.

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She shot up to the dressing-room.

After that, she guy'd the ballad off its hind legs with an appreciation of its bathos which she compelled the shouting audience to share. She even "addressed the audience" between verses, and thereby rendered herself liable to instant dismissal at the option of the management, as per the printed terms of her contract.

And, greater than the tribute to her new-fledged personality recently accorded by the public, was the unconscious meed paid by the friendly chaff of the few-liners.

The stage manager had, it appeared afterwards, received the full blast of her performance from his place by the switchboard, and, annoyed at first, had later given way to laughter, and opined that Jas had gingered up the show with even the deadheads eatin' her an' wantin' more! Then he told Oëlermann. The great man had been going the rounds of the vaudeville shows in search of novelties: he brushed into a stall at the last minute and awaited Jasmine Shelley's entrance.

He saw of course that it was good—he sank the man in the impresario—but even he did not see quite how good it was. "That flouted feeling" clouded his perceptions, but in a general way he recognized that here at least was a girl able to undertake any rôle at short notice. He offered her without enthusiasm the post of understudy to Miss Aubrey Provost, who was no less a person than Mrs. Marx Oëlermann.



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This lady shone solely by virtue of her domestic relation. Upon her marriage she had leapt like a smut into the public eye. She was detested by the company, fellow stars, chorus (especially the chorus), musical director, dresser, call-boy, even down to the humblest scrublady twitching holland covers off the fauteuils in the chilly merciless light of early morning. Her method was simple. Her mezzo-soprano, unable to compass high or low, would be just audible in the verse, owing to her having tantrum'd the orchestra into pianissimo at rehearsals, and, this over, the real business began with the sudden awakening to life of d'Álvarez' *bâton* on the entrance of the chorus, who executed patterns, movements, and engineered surprises of an amazingly elaborate nature. This was the result of endless and deathly rehearsals insisted upon by Miss Provost, and condoned irresolutely by her husband. The patterns, positions, surprises and illusions having been performed to the satisfaction of the house, which liked value for money, it was Miss Provost's little way to get her human *décor* off the stage a few bars before the conclusion of her number. The generous applause for the real workers (who were panting upstairs to make another change), she took to herself, blowing propitiatory kisses with a smile which was wiped from her lips the instant she pushed her way into the wings.

There was more than a rumour that once,



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when young Hervey Viner had torn the train of her gown by stepping on it in the sketch, Miss Provost managed later, when struggling with the burglar, to throw a vase at his face which caught him on the temple. He managed to play to the curtain, and even to stand bowing with the merry Aubrey, before walking off and collapsing in the arms of his dresser.

There had almost been a nasty scandal over that affair, and Miss Provost subsequently found such discomfort from an unfortunately sprained ankle incurred in her dance in the Tropical scene, that she was forced to relinquish her part for the week (see daily papers). There was also—to cite one of many such incidents—the time when Booby Larkspur, a troupe dancer, really did succeed in spraining her ankle, and appeared among the others skilfully bandaged under her pink tights. Miss Provost roundly accused her before the rest of “playing for sympathy” from the audience, and sharply ordered her to remove the bandage before the next number.

At the end of the week she got her notice.

When Jasmine Shelley was given the lead to understudy, the chorus confidently expected things to happen.

After weeks of routine Aubrey Provost had a violent quarrel with Oëlermann, the cause of which never became known to the company, and threatened to “down his show,” by which she meant that she would refuse to appear. She did not drive to the theatre until the show had

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been running over an hour ; and it was a shock to see " that Shelley " talking to the stage manager during a wait and wearing her—Aubrey Provost's—own gown which, Jasmine, built on finer lines, had some difficulty in wearing.

" Oh. So yaw the understudy " she remarked in her hard voice, and looked at the usurper scornfully. The stage-manager became exceedingly active at the switch-board.

Jasmine smiled. " You wur a little late Miss Pravust, so Mistur Oylurmn's asked me t' take it on. It was a bit've a rush as I waited till the last minute thinking you might turn up."

" Well, I'm here now. Tell them tew keep the curt'n down after the sketch. Yew'd better take off those things an' get back into the chorus, or whatever 'tis yew dew."

" Guess I can't do that Miss Pravust. Mister Oylurm'n told me to play to the end."

" Well, Mr. Oëlermun's made a mistake. If he speaks tew yew about it, tell'm I told yew tew change."

" Sahry, thayur's my cue." Jasmine walked on to the stage.

Miss Provost, as she watched for some hitch or " dry," prayed that points might miss fire, that even the limes might fail.

Since the part had been written around Miss Provost's hair and teeth by the groaning author, to whom that lady was a peculiar *bête noire*, a Ninetta Crummles, it did not suit Jasmine Shelley, so she altered the method of

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treatment and brought out the drama in the playlet which had hitherto been smothered in pearl-powder.

Oölermann joined his wife in the wings.

To him she turned, glad of something immediate to rend.

“What’s the meaning of all this?” she cried shrilly.

“Sh-sh,” he answered. “They’ll hear you from the front.”

“I don’t care a damn if they dew. What’s that six-footer of a girl dewing in *my* gowns? She’ll ruin ’em! What’s she dewing here at all? I s’pose yew’ve got your eye on her that yew shove her intew my part behind my back just because I was a few minutes late.”

“That’ll do Aub. We can’t suspend the bill because you don’t choose to stroll right into the theatre until an hour after the curtain goes up.”

“An hour! And if I come in *tew* hours late I go on, get that? I’ll bet there’s no slips in the programme even, either. *Why they might think it was me* thrashing around the stage an’ queerin’ the play, carryin’ on like a dime mellerdrammer. I’m queen of this theatre I’ll have yew know! What yew think they’ll think when they come here thinkin’ they’re goin’ t’ see *me*, and then a plunging beanstalk from the chorus comes on, under *my* name *tew*!!” At that moment, the curtains swished to, and Jasmine Shelley and Hervey

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Viner walked off to sustained applause. Seeing the couple, Viner fled. Jasmine stood her ground.

"Well, that needn't be done again till nex' time," she remarked with a grin.

"I s'pose yew think you're made now. Marx, tell this woman tew go."

Jasmine's lips tightened. "Thayur's no need t' lose your hayur Miss Pravust," she said quietly, "but if Mister Oylurm'n wants me t' finish t'night, I'm purfectly agreeable." She pulled off Miss Provost's leghorn and swung it by its velvet loops.

"Now, now, quit that Aub. Miss Shelley helped us out of a nasty place and saved me all the dollars I should've lost if the house'd got wise you weren't appearing t'night," he added, staggered at his own impromptu diplomacy. "The least we can do is t' let her play through for t'night, an' besides it's best not t' unsettle the audience. My rule is that whoever has to appear plays to the curtain—for the sake of the show. I can't stand for a shuffle right in the middle."

"Either She goes or I do, for keeps," screamed Miss Provost. "If you're tired of me I'm tired of yew, see? There isn't another theatre in Noo York where I'd get treated as I am here, an' by my own husband tew. It'll make nice readin' in the noospapers won't it, only I'll bet yew'll get ahead of me with some faked-up story, yew little liar! Oh Marx, I'm so miserable!"

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She flung herself into his arms and wept waterblack, her scarlet hair upon his shoulder. That was the equivalent to the minute of towel-flapping and water-blowing accorded the prize-fighter between rounds, and she soon reared up, after a few kisses of which the entering chorus, a stage-hand, and several lime-men were the witnesses, and directed her spleen once more upon Miss Shelley.

"Yew there still? Go back tew your dressing-room, yew've queered the show enough for one evening. It'll take me all I know tew repair the damage tewmorrow night."

The waiting chorus began to whisper.

"Queered the show?" said Jasmine reflectively, in her resonant voice.

"Yes, queered it. Making a funeral out o' the finale an' workin' it like a mellerdrammer in your great common voice. I thought"—with hysterical pertness—"the job of an understudy *was* to understudy, an' not go puttin' over any Mrs. Siddons stuff. Why didn't yew try tew *copy me*?"

"Cahmmon voice." Jasmine seemed struck with the term. "Copy you Miss Pravust? All right. I'm on." She disappeared among the crowd. "You wait," said Miss Shelley, and went in search of Mary Conder. "Dinkie, that woman makes me sick, but I'm going to fix hur."

"But Jas, this is *such* a chance for you. She'll get you fired if she gets her knife into you."

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“ Fired? Hah! I’d be fired a mile a minute for the sake of this one evening. Here, come on, *quick!* ” She ran to the dressing-room and tossing on a kimono, swept a lump of grease over her make-up.

“ *Jasmine what are you doing?* ”

“ You shut up my dearust. *I’m Aubrey Pravust!* ”

Jasmine wiped away the sunset mess on her face, and with immense pains proceeded to build up a pink-and-white *maquillage* strangely unsuited to her dark hair, eyes, and tan-coloured skin. She painted out with a stick of pale pink her generous mouth and powdered it before applying a scarlet cupid’s bow the size of a button. Then——

“ Give me that wig *deeur.* ” Mary, dazed, handed the golden bunch of curls, a facsimile of which every girl in the chorus wore as walking-dolls. The wig adjusted, Jasmine dusted it with bronze powder, pulled down the leghorn and advanced with a *vainqueuse* mince.

“ *Come with me tew buttercup land*

“ *Let me take yew by the hand*

“ *Daisies in the grass*

“ *Nodding as we pass*

“ *In that place of wonder*

“ *Nothing our true love shall sunder,*

“ *Come with me———* ”

“ Tscha ! ” said Jasmine, “ come with me right down on the stage is more our programme. ”

Arm-in-arm they hurried downstairs.

Oëlermann and his wife, who clasped him by



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the hand, sat in their private box and awaited the second half. When a second Aubrey Provost, taller, broader, tripped on, he gave a smothered curse. The original watched like a rattlesnake.

It was a brilliant piece of impersonation that Jasmine put over that night, exaggerated, but not offensively so. Aubrey's walk, Aubrey's fixed smile, her embryonic dancing, all, all were given. In the thundering finale of the production number, where the chorus dressed as Kate Greenaway lads and lassies threw real flowers to the audience, she contrived to shy an enormous cowslip ball at the Oëlermann box. It did not miss Mrs. Oëlermann. The curtains fell upon Jasmine's smile, which was not wiped from her lips the moment she returned to the wings.

And then—right on her triumph, tragedy; the harlequin-pattern of life and death, laughter and tears . . . the express message handed to her even as she sat regaling the room with further imitations. She read the terse message with wild eyes. The whiteness of her face was concealed.

And so she left Oëlermann's, and flew to Babs. There was also another gap in the company caused by the action of Mary Conder, who left to be by the side of the girl she loved better than anyone on earth.

Four months later, Jasmine Shelley sat in Oëlermann's office. She disdained the vulgarity of black for the dead. To him she talked



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as one business man to another. Oëlermann, who away from the mosquito-stings of his wife was a kindly man, made certain promises, and calling a stenographer from an outer room, dictated some letters.

“But why the change of name?” He addressed an envelope.

“Oh—— well, I just want t’cut that right out,” she answered quietly. “Change o’ business, change o’ name. I might as well go the whole hog.”

“Well, good luck to you wherever you go my dear, I believe you’ll make good. Your performance of——ah——my wife was a——remarkable one,” he added. “Only if I were you, I shouldn’t make a speciality of guying all the leads you understudy. I hope I shall hear of you some day.”

They shook.

“All the best.”



## BOOK II

# PLAY

### I

WHEN James Bounce, House and Estate Agent (and Decorator) had built up a sound connection in East Acton, he put into operation a scheme long debated by himself and his wife in the increasingly confined and inadequate space of their home above the business.

They succeeded in uprooting themselves and family from their somewhat squalid environment, and moved, after much discussion, to Monk's Green, which was just coming into its own as a good art-and-water suburb. Jimmy Bounce, junior, a capable youth then in his twentieth year, was recalled from his commercial college in the City and installed as overseer of the Acton interests, and Mr. Bounce, while his wife wrestled with the curse of the moving in, opened a branch of the business in Marylebone road, where it rubbed shoulders with a stonemason's yard and a professional lady who, from a chronic state of being "at liberty," had retired behind a dingy brass plate bearing the inscription :

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MISS LUCY WALTERS.

Elocution Lessons.

Pupils also taken for Mandoline and Piano.

A room was found for Jimmy near the Acton office, the rooms above sub-let, and it was arranged that he should migrate to Monk's Green for week-ends. Meanwhile, the rest of the family after having snacked off packing-cases and slept in improbable corners for a month, to the incredulous delight of the children, gradually settled down. Mrs. Bounce, after perusal of its prospectus, decided upon the nearest High School, one station away by Underground, for the girls, and began to take her social bearings.

Alice was the eldest girl and the "musical one." She did not noticeably resemble either of her parents, but was what some people take refuge in describing as "bonny," meaning to convey a face of no definite style or period.

Bessie, the second girl, was the plain one of the family, her father over again. From a stout and puffy schoolgirl, she became a stout and puffy young woman. She had no special talents, was somewhat lethargic and unenterprising, conventional to the core. She looked upon all man-kind with a sort of sacred awe.

Ella, the baby, had absorbed all the looks and was a replica of what her mother had been in her youth. She was the fluffy goldenhair'd type that attracts male admiration, but it was more than likely that later, if she was not exceedingly

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careful, she would coarsen and overblow as Mrs. Bounce had done.

Ella 'recited.' The stage was an *idée fixe*, a whim that did not cause her mother much anxiety, being a form of spring-rash which, she understood from other friends with daughters, was entirely natural to the age.

## II

THE circumstances leading to the presence of Leah Lawrence under this kindly commonplace roof were not hedged with mystery. Her mother, a professional singer, had, upon her arrival in Australia, seen fit to place her four-year-old daughter in safer hands than her own, and sent an allowance for her expenses, which, as Leah grew older and her mother better known in the concert world, became more ample.

At the time of the Bounce's progress to the rarer social air of Monk's Green, she was in her early teens ; a curious type, noticeable anywhere even then, with her shock of lustreless primrose hue'd hair, sloe-dark eyes, brows and lashes, and square, discontented mouth.

In other circles and other clothes she would have been the delight of artists, and her face would probably have become familiar to the chosen and elect at precious little exhibitions of the latest palette modes. But Acton and

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Mimosa Road, Monk's Green, to say nothing of the early authority of Mrs. Bounce, who followed the herd in the matter of hard and hideous "misses" hats, thick navy serges, ribbed woollen stockings and button ankle-jack boots, placed Leah's opportunities in abeyance.

Every year punctually, inevitably, the Bounces packed incredibly vast quantities of luggage and went on the last day of July to Shanklyn for the whole of August. One year they had sampled Ramsgate, but the groove was too deep and too smooth for such innovations.

Ramsgate, for Leah, was composed of beach niggers (it was something before the vogue of concert-parties), harbour, and hot asphalt. They had rooms in the Paragon facing the sea, and lying upstairs in her bed, Leah would be afraid of the swivelling red eye of the lighthouse at the end of the jetty. It seemed to make animate the pictures on the walls. She discovered that if she looked at an object long enough, and without blinking, it would always move, or change into something else. She would glare at the moulded cornice until it began to swing like a see-saw. Once in church during the sermon she had stared at Mrs. Bounce until the whole church was blotted out, engulfed in blackness, and near pews and windows flickered to extinction. Mrs. Bounce turned into a negress before her eyes, woolly hair and thick

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lips complete. It was perilously fascinating to watch the familiar features glooming away, and some new, strange head leering, dominating the old. And the heads were never the same. But they had one thing in common ; they were never 'English,' and therefore always faintly malignant. At the crisis of the apparition, Leah's skin would tingle. This was always the signal that the show was over. It was all very well in the daytime, but at night——! Once, unable to endure it all, she woke up Ella, who slept with her, and drew her attention to the fact that the children in "Give Doggie Some" had all changed places. Poor little Ella whimpered with fright, but Mrs. Bounce came upstairs and spoke in comfortable commonplace of to-morrow's excursion to Pegwell Bay, so the children, reassured by the hint of permanence, slept. It was good to know that when they had got through the tiresome but essential business of unconsciousness, the transformation scene would be set for them as soon as they awoke, and "Cousin Arthur," the smallest of the niggers, clapping his bones at 11.15, the shrimp or mackerel-monger bellowing outside while they sat bathed in sunlight at the breakfast table, and the asphalt, speeded up for the day to its usual heat, cracking and bubbling tar.

All her life long Leah recalled those family journeys, from the moment when they trundled from home in two fusty cabs piled with luggage and topped by a tin bath, oval and mustard-



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coloured, in which things were packed, to the piling in to the reserved compartment in the gloomy, echoing station that smelt of liquid smuts, oil and hardboiled eggs. A reserved compartment on these occasions was a necessity if the journey was to be endurable, with four fidgety little girls, and train-valiant little boy, to say nothing of the cheap nurse-maid which they shared among them. They had a succession of these flawed jewels. That year's incumbent had been a Lily Punnet, and from that time on, Leah turned against the name of Lily, and associated it with scumbled flaxen hair, weak eyes, and a lisp.

The salient features of the journey itself were sudden tunnels which were only mitigated by the lighting of matches to illumine the murk by Mr. Bounce, and the rattle out into sunshine again. Then when the novelty palled, Lily would take Ella into her corner and murmur, monotonous and subdued above the noises of the train, stories and jokes from coloured comic papers which Ella adored and "Ally Sloper's Half Holiday." Leah and Ella relished the girls in tights, they painted them in the lodgings on wet days.

And lunch.

Crumby, exciting; hard-boiled eggs that it was permissible to rap against the door to crack, and the chilly fleshiness of them. . . . Sandwiches smeared with paste that was the very essence of train journeys, mixed biscuits, and a

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banana apiece. This over, the children sat gritty, wriggling, crumpled and bored. Crumbs, egg-shells, spilled salt, twisted papers everywhere ; hampers lolling open—nowhere to rest your head, and after the first few hours, how your clothes and boots galled you ! . . .

And then mellow little Shanklyn at last, and immediate bed.

Life at Shanklyn was a careless sunny affair, the morning centred in the rush for the bathing-machines from which the children eventually emerged to choose among the beach's attractions, and eat chelsea buns which were hawked round on a tray by a boy.

Miss Flatman, the proprietress of Alberta Villa, was an imposing figure who "did" for the whole party through the medium of slaveys. She took orders for meals from Mrs. Bounce as she cleared breakfast—the only work she was ever actually seen to perform in person. But the menial flavour of the act was redeemed by her conversation, at once erratic and condescending. She related anecdotes,—or what her listeners could only assume were such—at immense length. It was only when she relapsed into sudden silence that realisation came that she had reached the end of her story ; there was no other satisfactory indication that her point had been made. Her talent for verbiage sounded plausible until critical attention was accorded. Not until then did the listener perceive with admiration that it was all about

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nothing. She also threw her audience off the scent by beginning in what seemed the middle of an idea. Leah called her "The Pageant" in allusion to her stately advance. With her dead and didactic eye and metallic voice, she gave an effect of some large organized progress. "Here comes the Elizabethan section," and the girls would strangle laughter, as patient, bewildered Mrs. Bounce coped with Miss Flatman's stories, culminating in a species of pompous shout with which occasional sentences were delivered.

"Ha, ha! Good morning. It seems—— strange to have fine weather at last. M'sister-in-law, my brother's wife, lives down at Broadhanger, they were married at St. Luke's. Round the Corner. They never thought it would suit them, not at all! and it was remarkable that we had the Reverend Claythorpe with us. He was here with his wife——little girl——very ill——, (she was lame of course). We said we couldn't take them in and they had the top floor which made things Very Awkward. Yes. H'm." Long pause. "This poor little girl—we all thought it was diphtheria, and of course her father was——out all day. (That was the year we had an accident on the pier). And having a clergyman in the house, we decided to risk it. And the poor little baby——of course Lady Marlowe was staying with us at the time——*her* daughter was engaged. To Be Married. Ha, ha! And what shall I do with the

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mutton, Mrs. Bounce? Shall I hash it or will you have it cold? With A Salad?"

And, tray in hands, she would impel herself to the door with an expression mirthless and disapproving.

Leah and Ella had a small bedroom which they shared with Lily Punnet. Lily took her supper with the slaveys and Leah would listen for them to pass the door, creaking and giggling at ten o'clock. On Wednesdays it was worse, for Lily took her afternoon off, and frequently came back late, waking up Leah who, furious, stared at her as she undressed. Lily would go to the evening fêtes with her friends and Leah watched the confetti being shaken out of her underwear. In the morning it lay, a rainbow mosaic, on the floor. Miss Punnet on these gala nights would come in creaking with ponderous care, concealing a bright "tiddler" behind her back. But Leah always saw. The children were never allowed to participate in the night life of the place. Mrs. Bounce said the fêtes were "common and rough." This was one of the endless restrictions which checked holiday pleasure. Leah and Ella would listen to the swishing past of the laughing concourse at eleven, or even later. It was thrilling, but a little terrific. So might the *sansculottes* have swept to the château of some hated *aristo*; it only needed the slightest re-adjustment to change the comedy tones into wave upon wave of menacing snarls, the "tid-

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dlers'' into pitch-forks, the confetti into stones . . . .

Leah wanted to go to a gala evening—if only to lay that ghost. There never seemed to be money for any amusement not approved or dispensed by Mrs. Bounce. Mr. Bounce was often "good" for stray sweets, fruit, and donkey rides, but approaching him for the treats took time. It often happened that the pleasure was forthcoming when their mood for it had passed.

One evening, Mr. and Mrs. Bounce went to a gala themselves, up some mysterious avenue like a mountain pass, grotto-like and dank with dripping ferns in the day; a place of facetious horseplay and paper lanterns by night. They returned early, hot, indignant and crumpled. Mrs. Bounce had lost her feather boa. . . .

Leah and Ella both fell in love with the same pierrot. They were not alone.

An unnumbered quantity of matronly hearts were annually fluttered by this devastating person who, Ella said, had "eyes like smouldering black-beetles," a slow sad smile, and a sweet drawling voice that lengthened each word to treble its span.

Leah, masterful and enterprising, got the best of it, while Ella, sheltered, orthodox and timid, tried, at first to outdo her, later, in despair, merely to equal her.

Ella, seeking for material to worship, wrote

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on a piece of paper the initials of the beloved, and slept with it under her pillow. Leah short-circuited the situation and got an authentic photo signed by The Hand itself.

In the little concert-hall, Leah, when the collection came round, furtively kissed the hot penny before reverently consigning it to the bag, feeling that perhaps it might prove to be the actual coin that *he* would reserve for his own private spending. She wondered what he would buy with it. Sweets surely, or perhaps a bun?

She felt that she was feathering his nest for him out of her savings.

That was during the first half of the programme, but as the second part drew near, she became taut with nerves. She knew that *he* would sing last but two before the end. The turn after his song was "sketches at the piano" given on a clear stage while the rest of the party retired from the platform, therefore he would obviously be behind the scenes. So at the moment the humours of the "village choral society" were launched, it would be her cue to make a bolt for the back entrance at the pier-head which she had long ago located.

Her exit was so meteoric that the Bounce party was paralysed. But scrappy whispers were passed along to Lily, who reluctantly thumped on her heels in pursuit.

In the narrow passage behind the little stage Leah, by some extraordinary fortune, hit upon



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the right door. The room was empty, but Leicester Carlyle's shaggy white coat, in which she had watched him walking off the pier every morning from the performance, hung behind the door. Some of his songs, all stamped "Professional Copy," were stacked in a corner, and a neat trunk filled up a space facing the door.

And Pagliaccio stood framed in the doorway, crisp and dainty in his pierrot clothes, and he stared at little Columbine sitting on his trunk in her brief muslin skirts, swinging her brown legs down which the socks were slipping, and he smiled kindly, sweetly, as only Leicester Carlyle could.

"Well dah! and what can I do for you?" he said in his soothing drawl, and Columbine gave a little gasp as she did each morning when she entered the sea.

But Leicester Carlyle had heard that gasp before in his time, and took her presence quite for granted.

It was always someone, only this someone happened to be younger.

He sat by her on the trunk and put his arm round her, and Miss Lawrence, aged eight, brazenly put her own round his laundered frill and kissed his powdered cheek.

He was immensely pleased, and lifted her on to his knees with a courteous "do you mind?"

They both knew she did not.



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Leah pulled nervously at one of his big black pompoms, not knowing how to unload all that pent-up conversation of which the pitiless minutes were depriving her.

"Well, darling, and how do you like the show?" he asked her, smiling into the eyes so like his own.

"I think if you sang *louder* they'd hear you better," said Columbine, not dreaming of insult to her beloved Pierrot.

"My God," answered Carlyle, "what a criticism! I'll remember," he promised her, "and if you can't hear me you must come round again and let me have it straight from the shoulder."

"I can sing your songs," boasted Leah.

"No! by Jove though, can you? come on, let's have it." And Leah, raising her yellow head from his frill, sang one of his most popular numbers that had mown down the susceptible in swathes before him, and caused endless blameless fathers of families dully to wonder at their wives' sudden frostiness, and the peevishness they seemed invariably to bring back with them from the seaside.

The song was "Little Dragonfly," and Leah sang it in a high clear voice, but dead on the note and perfect in time, and enriched it with unconscious copies of Carlyle's own charm of manner, sudden pauses and smiles. She even copied his drawl, thinking it part of the song. Carlyle called in one of his pierrettes to listen.

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“Capital dah ! I wish I could do it half as well. What do you think of my little fairy, Estelle ? Isn’t she a peach ? ”

And Estelle, the contralto pierrette, a pretty dark girl, warmly agreed.

Then he had given Leah the photograph already signed, but he solemnly assured her that it was his own writing, and leading her to the exit, bowed his Columbine away with a grave, sweet smile.

Back in Alberta Villa, Leah triumphantly brandished the photo at Ella, and Miss Bounce, aged seven, showed her hand in a refreshing manner, and burst into a dismal wail.

As she grew older, each year on the return journey from the seaside, it seemed to Leah, gazing out on the autumn night at strange rows of houses cut by brilliantly lit streets, that London was an easy place to conquer, that this was the last time she would so return, a nonentity powerless in the Bounce grip. By this time next year, or long before, she herself would be placed, free, in a position to dictate her own movements, no longer to leave Monk’s Green each year for one month exactly in a patriarchal herd. The very unfamiliarity of the nearer suburbs helped this idea. London was so vast ! There was room and to spare for her. And the sensation of fateful activity would gather as the train reached London itself, and would be only dispelled by the hideous details of the family disembarcation, and a sudden sharp word from Mr.

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or Mrs. Bounce. Even the crowded discomfort of the jolting home in cabs could not harm her much. Anything might have happened in her absence, and the future be awaiting her in some dramatic form in Mimosa Road.

Some letter perhaps. . . .

And realities would close in upon her from the instant the servant (in a violently new apron) stood at the open door, and they all crowded into the still and unnaturally clean hall, to the sick moment when Leah rummaged the accumulated pile of circulars stacked on the "settle," and found nothing for herself.

So it was not to be yet? Next year perhaps. . . . And she no longer wondered why she had so far failed to achieve; she began to remember the old difficulties. . . .

## III

JAMES Bounce had picked up enough hints from progressive clients to render him proof against the decorative pitfalls of his Acton abode. In that crowded dwelling, the art side was represented by pictures of the send-fifty-coupons-for-grand-free-gift variety, with wall-papers chosen from the "stickers" in stock, furniture in sets, and vases in pairs. But once established in Mimosa Road, Monk's Green, he made a fresh start, turned over a more artistic leaf, and

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achieved in the result the triumph of possessing a home very like every other in the road.

On Sundays the Bounces went to church as a matter of course. It was all of a piece with the Sunday joint, and to Leah, as an emotional experience, equally uninteresting.

Had Mr. Bounce dared, he would have been "Chapel," but his wife, after a discreet canvass of their growing list of acquaintances, was "High." To her High Church or Low Church meant high class or low class; the grades between she would probably have stigmatized as cranky.

Of the real admitted cranks of the Highest Thought Centre she had nothing to say. They were obviously outcasts, late-unclassifieds, hobby-mongers. Even to discuss them savoured of frivolity, and tolerance only meant that your own church was weakening its hold upon you.

To Leah, the merely spectacular side of the services at St. Cuthbert-on-the-Cart was so fascinatingly elaborate as to savour of a religious pantomime. The groupings, the serried lines of slim tapers upon the altar, the pairings-off and bowings of the choir boys, and the procession of banners, headed by a clumping silver crucifix, that swayed and billowed round about the church on festival days was a most satisfactory exhibition.

"Let us go forth in peace," sang the vicar a semi-tone flat, and the organ would blare out

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in an excruciatingly higher key. And go forth they did, walking carefully out of step by the vicar's orders. To march smacked of irreverence. Up and down, obscured by the altar as they passed shuffling behind it, led by the vicar himself, stiffened and jewelled like Queen Elizabeth, and walking like a pair of compasses. At sermon time the only hitch in the perfect stage-management occurred. The pulpit was situate almost at the doors, and as there were no pews, it was incumbent upon the congregation to rise and turn each his chair round to face it. This upheaval was carried out to the accompaniment of a fusillade of falling umbrellas and prayer-books.

Leah wondered what it was the vicar said which appeared to begin, "and now the father and the son," mumble mumble mumble, and she searched for it everywhere in the prayer-book, but it always eluded her.

As a child the word "vouchsafe" at once attracted and mystified her. She thought it might be a gutter-spout. It sounded rather like one.

A choir-boy cast a glamour over her owing to his solo verse which included an astonishingly high note. Youth—he was little older than herself—beauty and fame. She wondered if the other boys were jealous, but decided they too acquiesced in his glamorous isolation. They were obviously deeply religious; they led the adults in reverence. They must sometimes miss the peg-tops and marbles of human boys?

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And the smell of the church . . . individual, but indescribable. Like the Bank. . . .

Christmas service she loathed. She feared the crowds, and had once seen a woman faint because of the flowers and the heat, and had never forgotten it. Besides, the carols made her cry, and she always wanted to get home and look at her presents again, and find out if the postman had been.

She had read of young girls going through religious phases, and wondered that the same thing had not happened to her. It would have to be very carefully concealed of course; religious attacks were such bad form.

She could not have given her religious views as a broad whole, however crude, her mind was too distracted by the details of trappings and panoply at St. Cuthbert's. She could have told you all about *them*. With regard to wider issues she was perfectly content to remain in the dark.

She "saw" a spirit as a wraith-like silvery wisp of unconvincing, unloveable perfection; a formless swirl of smoke, and yet endowed with some semblance to humanity, if the picture-books were to be believed. Heaven was a definite place, like Clapham Junction, but literally "beyond the clouds," built of white marble and gold, like a music-hall without a ceiling, and the Dead a community dressed uniformly and unbecomingly in white, and engaged in mawkishly playing upon musical



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instruments in a state of beatification for which there existed no satisfactory reason.

She saw the whole arrangement as a sort of permanent Cook's Tour among marble vistas, under the supervision of a mild looking gentleman whose hair, parted down the middle, grew far too long, and who wore without exception complicated garments of draped blue and red.

She clung to the dear reality of what she understood, of people she had loved. . . .

That these should come to nothingness, should lie rotting on their backs for one to tread upon, was the only sacrilege.

Hell she dismissed as kitchen gossip ; otherwise she grew to regard it as a species of comic relief, and wondered that the pantomimic humours of it never struck the grown-ups.

## IV

IN the Mimosa Road house the small oblong drawing-room was on the ground floor, leading by three steps into the garden. Below, the Underground railway, from its seemingly obscurity, took it into its head to emerge at this point, like a rowdy serpent, and at regular intervals would boom its long tail of returning shoppers and business men and girls past the terrace of back-gardens, home to similar suburbs further afield.

The Bounce girls rather liked this.



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Leah and Ella's bed-room overlooked the railway, and the hoardings with their chintz-coloured advertisements of music-halls, soap, and coffee essence, and the high bank of slimy grass topped by tenements (Ancient Lights). They would sit at their window, to which they had dragged the table with its skew-eye cloth covered with lesson-books, and, in the intervals of committing the brainless ravings of Casabianca or his like to memory, they would gaze out, fascinated by the London dusk, the rumbling advent of the punctual serpents with their black rows of little doll-heads silhouetted against the orange light of the compartments. Foggy evenings too had their charm, for then it was a dim and blurred serpent that glided by to the 'noises off' of fog signals.

Here on November evenings, filled with a good stodgy tea, and warmed to suffocation by the gas-stove, it was pleasant to think how dreary the little garden must be looking, with its drooping clumps of dahlias, sodden and dripping, but prim to the end, like one's great-grandmother caught in a storm.

Here, "prep" over, it was good, if they were at the time on speaking terms, to indulge in gossip as scurrilous as their imaginations and vocabularies permitted, on the sins, faults, and personal appearance of the mistresses at school, and to recount the things one "nearly" said to Miss Spriggs when she only gave one B minus for a composition one esteemed a cynical gem of

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wit. The talk was all of what they "nearly" said or did, "I feel inclined to," or "another time I shall," or again, "The next time she does."

Then there were the joys of spending their pocket-money on fireworks, catherine wheels the size of a halfpenny which they pinned, thumping their fingers with the heel of an old shoe, to the shed in the garden. Bland little discs which hung awry while they lit matches, shivering with cold and excitement, and applied to its tip, when one of three things always happened. It would start with an unnerving "*Whoosh*" which jerked it off on to the path where it lay kicking, fall off unlighted, or revolve so rapidly that they only got their breath again what time the little twinkling passion-flower had whirled its life away. Then the children would rush forward to press their noses against the iridescent black mark it had left, and inhale the "heavenly" smell.

The Christmassy feeling usually came on the second week in November, steadily gaining momentum until it expired in the anti-climax of Christmas Day itself. It meant a subtle, gradual change in the shop windows, and going out in a "barge" with Mrs. Bounce to local bazaars, and even London ones as well. It meant supremely the pantomime, and, as adjuncts, scintillating wax dolls in stiff tarlatan and tinsel, with baby-ribbon wound criss-cross round their chumpy legs, ardently coveted by

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the little Bounces, who hated ordinary dolls. Above all Christmas was coming when the grocer round the corner began to supplement the post-office space by railing off a small island of counter to cope with the rush. Then catalogues from the big shops rolled in, thumping richly on the matting, and almost torn piecemeal in the struggle for "first look in"; and the lists of graded hampers with contents would be greedily perused. (A pound looked so rich, so almonds-and-raisin-y when written "per lb.").

Then, as the final days drew near, Mrs. Bounce, wearily and without joy, would labour at her bureau, wrapping up exciting parcels, sending cards, and remembering relations she had overlooked at the last dreary moment. The two younger Bounce children were awed and quiet at these times, and came to associate Christmas with some secret unhappiness which they supposed they would understand one day. But Leah was only enraged.

Why be so deliberately joyless? She would fume when Mrs. Bounce, nearly weeping, could not find the string, or dropped her scissors for the third time with a clash on to the floor.

Of course there were few sensations to equal the early waking in the very small, grey hours of Christmas morning, the chilly groping for, and finding, of the woolly stockings filled with rustling tissue-paper lumps. Although they disbelieved in Santa Claus, they would have nevertheless felt deeply injured had they actually

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seen Mrs. Bounce come in to fill them. Year after year they hoped they would not be awake when she did come in, and year after year they managed, or she managed, that they should be asleep.

Christmas breakfast was an ordeal which, as the Bounce girls grew up, became annually more acute. There were presents of course, but they must be thanked for publicly, and the girls must pin bright smiles on their faces and say gracious words to which their tongues had long been strangers. They must even kiss . . . . the ordeal that takes place in so many millions of dining-rooms on Christmas morning. They are all playing parts "for one performance only," and, like most amateurs, debarred from the easing power of a long run, are stiff with self-consciousness. How much better, thought Leah, if the presents could be conveyed per neutral serving-maid to each door, and there left to await reply which could be dispatched through the self-same domestic on her return, with words deemed suitable as thanks after the most searching investigation.

Under existing conditions, you must begin whooping with tentative joy on sighting your gift, continue to whoop as you fight with the strings and wrappings, gradually timing yourself to rise to a climax as they fall apart and reveal—a silver shoe-horn.

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### V

NEXT door to the Bounces, on the right, lived the Cedric Vernons.

Vernon was private secretary to an important theatrical agent, and Mrs. Vernon—a solid good-natured woman, looked as if she had in her younger days serio-comic'd on the Halls. She had a roystering smile which displayed a large and dazzling gold tooth, and scanty but periodically waved and tinted mahogany hair. She went through life diffusing stuffy blasts of Californian Poppy. She called it p'ffume. The Vernons had one child. Her parents had not attempted to combat Diana as a name, and, from the moment she could lisp, and stagger upright, she was encouraged to perform like a poodle (under the name of "Wee Di") at local and other functions, and on those Sunday evenings when the Vernons gathered to their bosoms theatrical and variety friends of various degrees of obscurity, with a sprinkling of mere neighbours by way of ballast.

Diana attended the kindergarten section of the High School, and the young Bounces and Leah Lawrence called for her each morning at nine at Mrs. Vernon's earnest request. At school, she attained *réclame* by reason of her connection with the stage, and of the fact that she had actually sung and danced at a charity matinée at the local Empire. She was taken

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up and noticed by the elder girls, and became positively odious instead of merely incipiently so, and far too big for her high suède boots.

Two afternoons a week Mrs. Vernon, by previous arrangement, secured her daughter's immunity from "prep," and herself conducted her, precociously clad, with bobbing sausage-curls and high heels complete, and with silk stockings upon her over-shapely legs, to a professional dancing academy off the Tottenham Court Road.

Mrs. Vernon had lumbered in to investigate the weekly High School class when first Diana joined, and raked the room with an experienced and disparaging eye.

Nothing doing here! Hudson's Academy it must be. They meant business, and were the recognized short-cut to the stage for juvenile talent.

So at a *barre*, and garbed in a ballet-skirt resembling a cutlet frill, Wee Di with *blasée* nonchalance performed *pliés*, *battements*, and kindred rhythmic labours in company with a host of other Wee Di's, while the mothers sat round and talked "shop," past, present, and to come.

## VI

MONK'S Green sounded remote country to the uninitiated acquaintance who had been pressed to "come over for the afternoon," and it usually resulted in his incredulous arrival by



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Underground from London in exactly ten minutes, and the consequent cooling of heels in unfamiliar roads for some half-an-hour before he could with decency ring at the bell for his tea.

This wide-awake suburb had its own edition of Bohemian life, and, like many similar communities, was firmly determined to be London-in-a-nutshell.

It had its Shakespeare readings, with light refreshments to follow ; gatherings brightened by the presence of those members who always read the "cuts" in a loud and cheerful voice ; its Browning Society (not quite so popular this), and its Highest Thought School, which possessed a small hall of grave artistic restraint, and a beautiful carpet. The irreverent alluded to it as the "sacred pile."

Here were held regular Sunday services by ladies and gentlemen of usually transatlantic origin, and curious double-barrelled names. The speaker of the evening would veer round to another subject which, in its treatment, cancelled out every thought that the speaker of the morning had revealed. But, in addition to this, there were week-day discourses.

On Tuesday next at 3. Mrs. Mary C. Placer Spout  
will speak upon :

"THE GARDEN OF EDEN."

(Admission 1/-).

Next Friday, Mr. E. C. Finsbury-Parkes.

"THE COSMIC OM IN RELATION TO THE  
PLASMIC OM."

There was an Amateur Dramatic Society



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which, in the intervals of muddling its accounts, and the inevitable heartburnings when Mrs. Black was given the solo dance in Act 2 because her husband was on the Committee, achieved some surprisingly good performances. This condition was probably due to the fact that the neighbourhood was becoming a very warren of out-of-work professionals ; a circumstance that the genteel residents—those with husbands or fathers in the City—combated in vain ; for there are some suburbs that seem to attract the lesser stage folk in their armies.

The young people of Monk's Green were naturally, though unflamboyantly, footlights-mad. The unspoken understanding, if of the female sex, with their parents, being that it was "only to pass the time."

Of the Society Mrs. Vernon was a feature as befitted a lady who, many years ago, had heavily trodden the boards, and perchance, who knows?, stood the almost-obsolete "chairman" a drink. Ella Bounce was found to be a great acquisition when vapid *ingénues* or cheeky "flappers" were required ; Bessie had been tried but found wanting, and Alice was too busy hammering on the piano in order to pass her teacher's examination to do more than occasionally attend the performances. Even stout Mr. Bounce had once been pressed into the service when a cast of unusual magnitude had absorbed those ordinarily destined for the ranks of supers, and perspiring, chuckling, and delighted, he

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had trotted on like a prosperous Smike as a general rebellion.

Leah Lawrence joined blindly for the fun of the thing when the aroma of school life still clung about her. Had she joined later, she might have hesitated. She could not take diversions in her stride; something inexorable demanded instant and supreme success in whatever she undertook.

"I suppose I'm not a sport," she ruminated, groping for reasons.

She remembered that once at school she had refused to compete for a very special prize offered for a subject on which she was particularly good. This latter fact was the secret reason for her refusal; the imperative necessity of shielding herself. Her pride must be kept intact. And even when the repairs had at last been executed, there was the plausible reason for failure that must be prepared in haste for the general public.

Perhaps the world saw her a mass of conceit? Had it a definite opinion of her up its sleeve? Leah put the harassing thought aside.

Her actual performances were always disconcertingly uneven.

Leah was at her best at understudy rehearsals, for, by that time, she had had opportunity to note in what divers ways her principal fell short. She was not creative as an actress. When an excitable miss "threw up her part and swept from the building," Leah shone in the rôle, and

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consciousness of virtue. Tears and temper steadied her. When the Committee cast, it was always completely in the dark as to how she would acquit herself. Her capabilities of surprise, pleasurable or otherwise, were endless. It could not classify her ; could not, as with Ella, say to itself, " H'm, Miss Bounce—ingénue ! " Leah was sure of a good part because she " looked interesting." That at least was undeniable ; but it was also said of her behind her back that she " acted best off the stage."

When Dicky Thurloe, robust and healthy, was cast for the part of an agèd and pathetic old man, despairing at his own absolute inability to portray the character, he retired to sit by Leah, whom the Committee really felt it had catered for at last in a rôle of the audacious-outdoor-girl type. To her he groaned his fill, and Leah, feeling extremely efficient as soon as she heard that he himself did not, picked up his part, glanced through it, and shyly offered to show him her interpretation. Stimulated by his gratitude, she did so until, realising an unusual silence in the room, she raised her eyes from the script to find the rehearsal suspended and the members listening. To her astonishment they applauded and Dicky patted her on the back.

But you cannot give an old man part to a girl !

In her own slangy rollicking rôle, Leah proved so poor that it was given to the understudy. Rollick she could and would had it been

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disapproved, but to stand there licensed to get laughs, to revel ! Her mind became a charnel-house of dismal thoughts, and her behaviour correct in the extreme.

Anne Sleath, art student at the Academy Schools, was a great friend of Leah's since the night when a chance meeting in a theatre queue had begun the acquaintance. She vociferated to be made a member, but found that Monk's Green was too tiresome a journey after a trying day with the antique.

Anne was about the show-girl height, some five feet ten inches, with auburn hair which she did in a different style almost every day, beautiful clear blue eyes, good teeth, and figure of a gracious angularity that added to her height. She was a hearty soul, brimming with life and scandalous gossip. She was a social hold-all of confidences. She had a tiny house in Barnes where her friends would repair (she seldom troubled to go to them) and where someone was generally lounging and smoking at ease and temporary suspension from stress in her *passé* little drawing-room. It was pleasant to have their foes lashed for them, and they could always depend upon Anne to do that.

"Come in old precious !" she would cry, irrespective of sex, and the old precious would sink in silence into an arm-chair whose cretonne covers shrieked aloud for the wash-tub. In her chequered career, Anne had served many apprenticeships, including that of the theatre ; but

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there was scarcely a theatre in London in which she had walked on that she had not, sooner or later, walked off under a cloud of stage-managerial displeasure. Pioneers from the ranks are not encouraged.

## VII

AT the time of the removal to Monk's Green, Leah Lawrence offered little to the domesticities but chancy moods (and perhaps her mother was to thank for that). Then Leah was "on" to things quicker than the stolid little Bounces. Her sense of humour left the Bounces far behind, bewildered, but content, for, as compensation, they had their own jokes which left Leah cold. Prim little concepts of fun which the atmosphere of the High School only fostered, and which would doubtless degenerate later, when in male society, into "playfulness."

Early days at school held for Leah vague discomforts of juxtaposition with Ella.

Leah had been tentatively placed in a higher form, but the afterwards depended upon herself. She marked time watchfully. If Ella shaped creditably, it meant hard work for Leah. Luckily, Ella seemed satisfactorily normal in her regard for instruction, although displaying at times a disconcerting aptitude for arithmetic. Leah took refuge in a lusty contempt for this particular manifestation, deliberately fell behind

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with her own sums, spread it about that she had no talent that way. "I always think if you can add that's all that matters."

"But you don't want your children—when you're grown-up and married—to be bad at arithmetic just because you were," said Miss Barker, in the unbendings of recess. Miss Barker "took" the history and literature classes; she could afford to be jocose. She was attracted by the pretty child, so insurgently unlike the others.

"Oh I can't bother about *them*, besides, I don't mean to marry," answered Leah noisily. She always tried to make points with the mistresses.

Committed to this line, she was more careless than ever; she now had a reputation to live down to. What a thousand pities Miss Barker was not more attractive, besides being of that inhuman order, a mistress! Leah thought she would be easy to acquire. But Miss Barker was quite out of the lists. Leah had made as much headway with half the other teachers—more with one or two whom she decided were "worth while." There was the visiting dancing mistress, who, not being a part of the school scheme, was placed within the bounds of amorous possibility. Besides, her romantic craft—she was a mediocre performer but a good instructor—made her a person apart. She brought with her hints of the outside world where Things were going on while you stuffed your



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head with matter deemed necessary to youth—like chicken-pox or measles—and which you would discard with the serene compliance of the authorities the moment you left school. But dancing was life ; that alone you expected to meet again. It was such a delightful thing that Leah wondered why it was included in the course.

Miss Vane singled her out from the first lesson, which automatically precipitated things with Leah. Miss Vane came twice a week, for the juniors and seniors. From the start Ella was nowhere, and pranced with her knees well bent in the remoter rows. Leah led the juniors. Quite soon she was told off to “show” the seniors. Bessie was hopeless, and spent half the lesson on a chair, or out of the room in search of a glass of water. Alice had extra music in the dance hour, and slaved in an upper class-room bent over the keys, missing the vigorous exercise below. Miss Vane’s standards were not high. The girls began with clubs, balls, and skipping-ropes, and, after a prolonged period of “fancy” dances, the lesson degenerated into bumping and jolting in couples round the room. This was the “ball room class.”

Leah was becoming spoilt. Her unique position in both classes was undisputed ; it was the only triumph she achieved. She reigned on Mondays and Thursdays.

The question of a “heart-attack” over Miss Vane lapsed in a few weeks. Leah found her



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hands too full with her performances. Love was essentially an idle emotion, and the almost sickening stimulation of the two classes took everything out of her. And Ella began to make her uneasy. It started harmlessly, with a strictly conventional passion for Miss Barker. She left no hackneyed *ruse* untried. Punctuality, a clean blackboard, bunches of flowers—all played their respectable parts. Leah was loftily amused. Ella was “such an *obvious* child,” a typical school-girl Leah called her. Sixteen showed fifteen how the thing should be done, and Ella gaped at the possibilities sketched by the reckless pioneer. Afterwards Leah was sorry for having revealed some of the methods of her own superior campaigning, for Ella struck out a line of her own, and working frantically, secured a remove into the form where Miss Barker taught. Leah’s form. That solution Leah was scornful of; her own ends she wrested through personality alone. She rejected labouring for love.

Leah was disliked by the majority at the High School, but the minority she dazzled. She inspired various transitory adorations, but, her vanity gratified and at rest with the acquisition of some carefully-made slave, would be left to stand, forlornly, in the play-ground filled with rage that must be concealed, while the slave paraded enlaced with another girl, whom Leah had never dreamed of reckoning with.

The impression of success was impossible to

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sustain. And Leah, talking very brightly, very rapidly, to sundry nonentities, always with one furtive eye on the deserter, would subconsciously feel that the break should have been definite, if break there had to be. A thing of spoken words and, if possible, of reasons.

It was a faint echo of the lower-middle-class instinct for a 'scene.' But this jolly promiscuity—this leaking away without good-bye, was beyond her. It hurt. When Leah loved, she loved. Hitherto she herself had proved fickle in the end. She felt she should be always warned against possible coming lapses. Otherwise it was—unfinished. It was the dramatic instinct, another heritage from her unknown mother.

Leah was an inveterate *poseuse*. She rehearsed in a world of her own, and presented the results to her associates. From about the age of seven, it seemed to her that she was a character in a novel, and she would imagine what the remarks of the Bounces would look like in print. There was no definite plot, nor did she herself pose as the heroine, she simply "saw" them all, herself included, as giving out fragmentary printed matter.

Perhaps at breakfast one of the girls would say :

"*Ugh!* How *beastly* cold to-day!" And Leah, throwing this material into form would silently round off the remark; "said Bessie Bounce with a shudder." When life

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ceased to appear in book form, Leah and the Bounces automatically became actors in some play, and then their remarks needed no mental rounding off, but became sheer dialogue. When one of them left the table or walked out of the room, they seemed to Leah to be simply obeying a stage direction.

At school, she had bursts of high spirits which were the result of a desire to make a sensation ; helped in the first instance by the perusal of those school-girl stories in which " Fascinating Rose " or " Madcap Maggie " ruled the idolising community with flashing smiles, bewitching laughs, and tossing hair that fell " far below their waists."

Unfortunately the last essential was impossible of realisation. But Leah went in for the other lures, and at odd moments would, sitting at her glass, unconsciously rehearse one particularly difficult stage direction ; namely that one in which the mouth of Angela Mauleverer, the witch of the school, " trembled with suppressed merriment." The result looked to Leah like a painful nervous affliction, but later, in the cloak-room, she found it went much better. She was at her best with an audience.

Then there was the tiresome business of Stella Mainwaring ; (see " A Bevy of Maidens "). The speciality of this young dazzler, who possessed besides the usual assets of adoring whimsical father in Ireland, (" Wisha Mavourneen, but it's a broth of a counthry it

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is ”), the ability to ‘answer’ the mistresses at school with a delightful impertinence that caused the latter to “smile in spite of themselves,” and to be so audaciously demure in the doing, that retribution never, never fell upon her. Leah, seeing herself in the part, would render original versions ; but she always either under or over-did it, or was blunt to rudeness. Sometimes she succeeded, and made a haul of at least one new slave, but on one of the unfortunate occasions she was informed that the headmistress wished to see her at noon the following day. She began to plan with some pleasure the lines on which the interview should be conducted.

The book of the words, she thought, might for instance run as follows : (see “Naughty Nan,” Messrs. Longbow and Venture, 6/- net).

Head : “Well Leah, sit down my child. I am distressed Leah Lawrence that you have been sent to me just like this. Miss Spriggs tells me that she cannot understand you this term.”

Leah : “You see, Spriggy——er, Miss Spriggs, ——” (*with a “twinkle of fun”*).

Head : “My Child, I Am An Older Woman Than Yourself. During all the years that I have kept school, I have never met a character that exhibits such incomprehensible frivolity together (*very gently*) with such Grand Possibilities as does your own. You see I am giving you the perfect frankness which I ask from all my pupils.”

Leah : (*tears brimming her eyes*). “Oh Miss Ragget, I don’t know why God made me

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so—— hateful. (*With an ingenuous outburst*). Something seems to get inside me and make me say things Just To Shock People. *I'm a Horrid Girl!* ”

Head: (*smiling involuntarily*). “I do not think things are as bad as you make them out my dear, and for the rest, you know my methods. I do not punish. I suggest to you that you should merely make a full and most complete apology to Miss Spriggs before the whole school to-morrow.”

Leah: (*bursting into tears*). “Oh how I love you! How we all love you! You are the Truest Influence in our lives. How could I ever trouble you? Why, I love you dearly!”

Head: “Now leave me my dear child. You were always my favourite, Leah Lawrence.” (*Kisses her with solemn tenderness upon the brow*). *Slow Curtain.*

But Miss Ragget plunged into the business with such abruptness that Leah, having no time to select an expression, was left stammering idiotically, just a scared school-girl.

“I'm sorry that you have been sent to me at last Leah. Sit down. I am sure Miss Spriggs would not have done so unless it had been really necessary, although she has often felt obliged to speak to me about you. And not only Miss Spriggs, but several of the other teachers.”

*Awful!* What on earth had they been saying? And which ones could it have been? This wasn't fair, it was hitting in the dark. When a mistress was stuffy with you it was her business to say so, and refer you on to get rowed by the Chief Constable in a decent way.

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"Oh," managed Leah on a broken note of interrogation.

"Yes. You know Leah, I should like us to understand one another——"

Ah! that was better. Miss Ragget was leading up to Leah's cue for "I love you dearly."

But even if the cue emerged from all this illegitimate gagging, Leah knew herself unable to take it. A fund of commonsense held her back from her proper position on her knees by Miss Ragget's lap. Besides—she did not love Miss Ragget. How thrilling it would be if she could manage to. But your schoolmistress is of course your natural enemy.

The subject of her thoughts was speaking again.

"You know, Leah, I think you're too old to go on like this. It looks bad to the younger ones, and I am so proud of my First Class ——. It's so unlike you. It's really unworthy of you. (Cue?) All your teachers are noticing it." (Horrors!)

"I don't think I've done anything so very dreadful," plunged Leah. But the other passed this over. "Now you mustn't be kept any longer from your class. Go now dear, and let me hear better things of you."

And the worst of it was, that, in a species of for-the-good-of-the-community way, that reckes nothing of the tortuous processes of emerging individual characters, Miss Ragget was right.



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She had conducted the interview "as one lady to another."

Confound her!

But all the same, Leah fancied she had created a good deal of interest in that quarter.

About once a year the High School girls were given an inadequate scope for their energies, in the shape of a Greek play. Miss Ragget, with a certain suppressed, smiling confidence, loyally trusted her girls. Three had passed the 'Senior Cambridge'!

As "Maidens," Class Three, with hair bound unfamiliarly with tape, walked chanting "off" into the pantry; ("it will sound so distant"), and those with long parts remained jammed behind the book-case until their cue in order to avoid being raked by the audience.

The girls were messily made up by a mistress in a distant class-room, and wet white sponged on to inky hands. The audience, composed in bulk of parents, behaved beautifully under heavy provocation.

Bessie Bounce was chosen by the faculty to play Alcestis. In her home-made gown of butter-muslin Ella said she looked like a classical bolster. Leah was a mere "maiden," being in a class below, and filled in with 'general utility' as someone was always ill at the last moment. She knew everyone's lines, and at the dress-rehearsal for servants, and pupils not appearing, she was called upon to amalgamate



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the parts of three absentees, which she did with considerable skill. Ella was only a spectator.

The Headmistress in person conducted the endless choruses in an angle of the wall, and, with the music and a full fountain-pen, angularly sawed the air, with results to the wall-paper and whoever happened to be dressing the stage in her vicinity.

There was a bright moment when somebody's venerable father's beard slipped and hung pendant throughout the whole of a scene, and an even brighter one when the conductor, in a musicianly rhapsody, flipped a splash of red ink on Bessie's nose. There was "The Terrible Episode of the Black Kitten." In an oration, including sundry requests for the personal arrival of Zeus, the actor alluded to "This welcome stranger," and the school cat, diabolically timing its entrance outside the door, blew in sideways up to the footlights as would a popular *comédienne* sure of her welcome. There, in the flattering silence consequent upon its appearance, it coolly surveyed the audience, turned, and walked up-stage to the minute conservatory which was the Palace of the wavering Admetos.

And prim little Lettice May correctly commenting:

"This best of *wimming* bound for realms below."

Fleshy Eileen Standish "did" Hercules, or Heracles—Miss Ragget was a little pre-

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cious——, and roystered 'off' in a lady-like manner.

"Ha Ha" she piped politely, and smashed the saucer she had begged from the kitchen. So thin, so homely was the sound produced, it gave an effect of *contretemps*.

Over-tall Freda Layton made a diverting "Death."

"All things thou cans't not have, my rights for *me*!!" (And will there be anything further Madam?)

A faint interest and a little regret was roused in Leah when Alice left school. She was now nineteen, and from henceforth she would concentrate upon her musical career. Her studies she could pursue at home for the time that might elapse before she obtained a post, and in the general sense, she was "finished." Leah was sorry for Alice; there was, she thought, precious little to show that it was her last day. Alice for some reason—and no one seemed to know if it was one of choice or finance—was to be regarded in the future as a 'worker.' She slid therefore from school into life without those pleasant social God-speeds that mark the launching of the average girl. She didn't seem to mind. Leah did not think she had made much impression upon the life of the school. For that matter neither had the other Bounce girls. Alice, normal and healthy, was merged in the senior's world; Bessie, who "found it difficult to keep up with the work," as the Headmistress, quot-

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ing from reports, told Mrs. Bounce, hung on to whoever noticed her, vacantly staring about when vivacious knots of classmates gathered together. Ella, comparatively, had the greatest success ; but convention stood at her elbow during her occasional moments of audaciousness. Speaking generally, Leah thought Ella came under the small-fry heading.

Leah wondered if the two elder girls experienced the sentimental crises she herself did. They seemed to her singularly passionless. Ella hardly counted ; she was always with the majority ; Bessie's heart appeared to be an organ of her body alone. She had not even the dog-like devotion which generally accompanies sluggish natures. Alice was always modified and decorous in her affairs. She was liked by all the mistresses, who imparted a suggestion of fellowship in their dealings with her. She even 'went to tea' with one of them. Poor old Alice ! She was devoted to Miss Ragget, who promised her references whenever she asked for them. So Alice left.

Leah thought " If I can't do it better than *that* ! " . . .

Rebecca Kingsly was the daughter of an artist, and was the central figure in one of his best-known posters. Her purple-bronze hair kinked about her face, and her green eyes were humorous. She wore exhausted-looking Liberty dresses, and scarf-swathed hats at school. Her parents would not hear of the

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orthodox wear ; so Rebecca went her own way. The drawing-mistress, in sympathy with her pupil's state of mind of which her frocks were a symbol, called her "The mischievous Botticelli."

Rebecca Kingsly was witty, and could imitate. She and Leah evolved a repertory of turns. She was especially happy in her impersonation of Miss Vane, and burlesqued the dances openly in class. Leah and Rebecca were now with the seniors. Rebecca tolerated Miss Vane because of Leah, but herself took private lessons with Falutino. She was a beautiful dancer, and sickened Leah of her own performances. She imbued Leah with contempt of the class, and Leah got excused from attendance.

Rebecca dominated Leah, who bowed to the inevitable. Leah deeply attracted the other, and their passionate admiration of each other's looks and ways waxed daily.

"I don't know which I admire the most, but I know who I like the best," said Leah. "I think each thing you do more perfect than the last," Rebecca would answer, kissing Leah's hand and rubbing it against her tanned cheek. Then almost simultaneously : "Let's do Miss Barker and Worm-i'-the-bud." This was Miss Proctor, the drawing-mistress.

Leah 'lived' at the Kingsly's house at first ; the Mimosa Road hospitalities were impossible for many reasons. Mr. Kingsly was interested in his daughter's friend, and made a sketch of

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her of which he made no public use, to Leah's great disappointment. A reproduction of the poster in which his daughter figured hung framed in Rebecca's bed-room. Leah asked for a copy, but Rebecca was curiously shy of making use of her father in any way that concerned his profession.

The freedoms of life, foreshadowed by Rebecca Kingsly's clothes, began dimly to open up desires and speculations in Leah Lawrence. They definitely dated from the day when Rebecca dressed Leah in one of her frocks, and they came down to tea in Jasper Kingsly's studio.

Leah, singularly backward, recognized with a shock that she herself was pretty. This altered life. The company of her fellows at school had done nothing to quicken her perceptions; the looking-glass meant nothing. Fashion-papers belonged to the grown-ups, and by their essential dullness were outside her orbit. The discussions of the girls and their delight in an impending new frock, together with long technical descriptions of the same, only accentuated to Leah her glimpsed apartness. She was rather like a boy. . . . The other sex she never thought about; she only knew that the girls who discussed 'men' at school were the wrong sort. These girls ignored her, bored her. But friendship with Rebecca Kingsly stimulated in her the essential and unutterably trivial apprehension of costume. Inevitably with this came the belated



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beginnings of 'the money sense.' She even contemplated asking Mrs. Bounce as to her financial standing.

The auxiliary realisation that her own clothes were hideous marked an epoch. At this time she was swept from discovery to discovery. Intensely conscious of her frock, she waited on Mrs. Kingsly with tea and cakes.

To the unexpected visitor, a brother artist of Kingsly's, tentatively dropping in from his own studio for tea, Leah seemed eminently in the picture, and his eye, restless for effects, lit with instant commercial appreciation upon the two girls sunk upon the divan at the further end of the room. And then Mrs. Kingsly handed him his cup, and the speculative interest was gone as he thanked her.

"Cannon, this is Miss——— Lawrence." Mrs. Kingsley perfunctorily murmured the introduction. Cannon put down the cup and gave Leah his peculiar wringing handshake.

"So it is a girl," he smiled. "I thought it was an orchid." Rebecca's Liberty crêpe clung in its sticky folds to Leah's body, its viperous purple showered with irresponsible yellow ovals rimmed with scarlet. And then Cannon tramped out in the wake of Rebecca's father to his own studio.

Leah could not remember what response she had made to this. She supposed, with fatalistic resignation, that it had been inadequate. "What



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does one say to a remark like that?" she smiled at Rebecca. "Goodness knows," laughed the artist's daughter, "try 'don't mention it,' or 'the pleasure is yours' next time—if there is a next time." But her fingers were enlaced in Leah's, and they lay, shoulder to shoulder, on the cushions, and Mrs. Kingsly played minuets and rigaudons, even mazurkas, on the spinet, and the rustling notes chimed out faded gallantries. The coquetry of all the ages.

Versailles; the whispering of tinted taffetas, gleam of light on satin, soft breeze from the lake; mockery sparkling through the velvet mask, lasciviously demure. "Lud, Sir, I protest——!"

Years later, the candelabra brilliance of an 'Assembly.' Soft dependence in tarlatan armed back to mamma. Flap of cards in the adjoining room, aristocratic raddled harpies biting their painted lips. Mrs. Grimsby, flashing her acid glances, plumed *toupée* a-bridle; she was ever a bad loser. . . .

And later still: To-morrow George is to dine at five with The Family, and escort Amelia to Cremorne. . . .

Work became only a background to thought.

People that had paid Leah compliments were right after all! Until now, flattery had been a tiresome form of chaff.

Leah fervently longed for lessons to cease, to know how she stood in the world.

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Rebecca was extremely popular at school ; she possessed those qualities which Leah so egregiously lacked. The cliquish and conventional respected a genuine free-lance. The budding snob in them bent to her clothes and her father's name. Leah was nowhere. She had not even the dancing-class now. More and more Rebecca became absorbed into, and associated with, certain units. Leah's position was awkward and unhappy in the extreme. She could no longer blind herself into belief that Rebecca was wholly hers ; she seemed to be everybody's, in an easy degree. Leah considered that she had " introduced " her to the school, and now, like a ladder, she was kicked over. Leah would stand morosely by at recess while the other expended herself. She shrank from reproaches, they invited the beginning of the end ; brought in to the light what she still tried to bury. The others had been " different " ; this was real.

Leah could have stood the mass, but when it became apparent that Rebecca responded to the vociferous or pressing affection of individuals, she grew miserable and showed her hand. One younger girl, Alison Taft, became noticeable ; and rioted in spring-madness over Rebecca Kingsly, who took her up. They would have formed a trio of friendship but for Leah. She set herself to winning the child, and succeeded, up to a point. Alison would dog her footsteps—if Rebecca was not by ; when she appeared, she would shout and transfer the clinging of her

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bony little arms. "You and Rebecca are the most scrumptious people in the world," she cried to Leah. And once, when they were standing round the biscuits and milk, and when Leah was trying not to see that her share of these refreshments was being saved for Rebecca, who had not yet appeared; "If I can't have Rebecca, I'll have you."

Leah never spoke to the child again.

But in the main Rebecca stood by Leah. The very routine of their intimacy now became a stumbling-block. They had been accustomed to wait for each other in specified corners of the building, to refresh themselves with mutual sight, if only for a minute, before separating to classes. Seats together at lectures and any public assembling of the school were a necessity recognized by the whole school. But that had been the first to go. Rebecca's appearance in the lecture-hall was gradually wont to be the signal for a scramble to sit beside her. The number of scramblers was now quite formidable. The girls, respecting Leah's claim in all other particulars, seemed to regard the semi-recreation of a stray lecture as public ground, in which she who timed and pounced had fairly earned the privilege.

Stern as Napoleon Leah watched the struggle. Very soon the spectacle was intolerable. Leah would come in late that Rebecca might be hedged about. Then, with an easy mind, she could sit where she chose enclosed with her own

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devotees. Across the rival camps she sent furtive glances—when Rebecca was not looking.

The going home together had been the crux of the day. But would these conditions hold good now? Leah was at sea as to her own attitude; there appeared to be no middle course. And Rebecca; what did she mean to do? The sentimentalist in Leah urged that the fault should not be on her side.

With compressed lips and uneasy eye she took up her stand at the end of the corridor outside the senior class-room, an old tryst. As doors slammed and the passages rang with voices above the clamour of the recess bell, she moved away. Rebecca didn't deserve it. This, after all, would set the tone of future encounters. The onus of choice should rest upon Rebecca. She was sure to wriggle out of it somehow. Leah, similarly cornered, would have given kiss or blow, but Rebecca—she had her doubts. The artist's daughter, despite her Bohemian front, was more fundamentally normal than Leah, and, like a tactful hostess, would skim over an awkward situation. She appeared to Leah to be becoming more "ordinary" every day.

Rebecca stood at the end of the corridor, a girl upon each arm pulling at her and gabbling. "There you are!" she sang out, "I've been looking for you everywhere." Custom caused one of the girls to stand aside as Leah advanced uncertainly. Rebecca took her arm in a busi-

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ness-like way. The four went down to the cloak-room.

Leah dressed slowly. She intended to give Rebecca time to be off with her admirers. "Hurry up Leah, you're not staying for gym are you?" Rebecca had forgotten that Leah never did. Once the detailed course of their joint lives had been as an open book, avidly perused. Rebecca, Leah diagnosed, was probably suffering from mental indigestion. Her hands shook as she fumbled about. At the door someone tried to chat. Leah rushed past in the wake of Rebecca.

This was going to be a fight to a finish—one way or the other.

She asked Leah, walking home, "what had changed her? Ally says you never speak to her now. You're not half such fun as you used to be. Everyone thinks so."

Leah said nothing. She was stunned. Rebecca chatted breezily and Leah tramped speechlessly beside her, like a churl. Jolly school chat at first; Leah thought "strip that sickly rag off her and she's pure High School underneath." Rebecca changed to polite small-talk. She seemed intangibly to reprove Leah for her suburban sulks. She had the advantage throughout. In the main road there were more girls waiting. Rebecca, good form personified, bade Leah good-bye at the Underground and turned away in their company.

Leah shuffled on blindly, she could not face

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the station. And suddenly, preposterously, in the middle of the street, she was crying ; thick tears that glazed her cheeks and rolled enormous on to her satchel.

Deliberately she wrenched Rebecca from her life. She had put all her eggs into one basket, as usual ! Well, if Rebecca was blind to her misery and only noticed the result on the social life of the school, then Leah had no use for her. The right word would have brought her running. Without it, she kept her rule remorseless.

Rebecca, piqued, callously went her easy way of triumph. Leah lost her "remove" and drifted.

## VIII

THE MONK'S GREEN "Literary Circle" met at each other's houses once a week in its first enthusiasm, and afterwards, once a month ; to it the youthful members were surprisingly faithful.

No one was prepared to state who had founded it, knowing the trouble he would resurrect for himself if he ventured on a definite name. Leah Lawrence asserted that the founder was herself. In proof, she said that, walking home with Dicky Thurloe, who came into his own in the summer months as the best tennis player in Monk's Green (and hibernated



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the rest of the year), she had said how awfully jolly it would be if Those Who Wrote could meet "and have a good jaw once a week!" She had won an essay competition in a children's paper.

But, as usual, the palm was wrested from her. Dicky mentioned the matter to Cynthia Dart, the "belle" of the tennis dances who herself wrote trickling little odes for the Parish magazine. The latter was smitten hip and thigh with the idea, and crystallised the scheme in the form of printed membership cards which she freely circulated. One fell into Leah's hands. She canvassed her friends, but her claims passed over them with the more solid proof of the cards. On every hand she heard of "Cynthia's" literary club.

Exhausted with passion, Leah told herself that she would not go near the Circle. When the evening came, she went. The question of the foundation was never broached, and in the spectacle of pose and careless costume that the majority of members had assumed, she found so much cause for mirth that she resolved to overlook the matter. She found in the meetings something solid to fall back upon in the months to come.

That she was the youngest member was balm to Leah. The veteran, Angus Macmahon, was twenty-two. Ella, bowing ungraciously to the inevitable, was not present. Leah had feared trouble with her; Ella had a fighting spirit akin

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to her own. But she had her trump card ready ; by no elastic stretch could Ella be accounted eligible. Who wanted a person of fifteen and a half of no literary pretensions? Alice never gave trouble. Her wishes were always easily manipulated. She dumbly acquiesced in Leah's far-sighted organisation.

On the evening itself, Bessie was discovered "ready" in the drawing-room. This was a shock to Leah. She decided upon elaborate surprise, and hooded the venom of her look.

"Oh, going out too?"

"Well, yes. It's the meeting to-night isn't it?" Suspicion loomed in her eye.

"Oh, I didn't know—I mean, are you joining too? We only meant it for people who write, you know."

"You'd rather I didn't come?"

How common she was when she tried to be dignified ; all her phrases ran to the obvious. How thickly unconscious of the possibility of exclusions on the part of the Circle. It was like her to say nothing until the night itself, and then be waiting, trussed for the outing. It was not guile either. . . .

"Oh, of course not," a row was a thing to be avoided. Bessie embroiled the whole house in her discontents. But all the same, Leah did not intend to let her off too lightly.

"You see—we haven't settled yet about bringing in out——friends."

## PLAY

Bessie's face crumpled like a baby's. "You little beast!" she said slowly, and swung out of the room.

"You unnecessary fool," muttered Leah. A scene was now inevitable; that being so, she wished she had made the matter even plainer while the other was there.

Mrs. Bounce came in emanating unease. Her brows sketched enquiry. Leah, chafing to be off, meant to be done with the matter before she left. She did not intend to return to more scenes.

"I'm afraid Bessie's upset. It's the first meeting of the Literary Circle you know, and of course I've got to go as I started it all. I didn't know she expected to come too."

"No, I know dear, but they won't mind, I'm sure."

"Well they won't say so if they do, but you see, the whole point is to keep it to people who write."

"Yes, yes, of course. I'll try and put it to her afterwards. But couldn't you go and say something to her?—Tell her it's all right. Quick dear before she takes her dress off, there's a dear girl."

Leah wasted no time. She knew she would find Bessie in uncouth abandon on her bed. "She's the sort that takes to her bedroom like some people take to drugs," Leah had once said to Alice. She hurried upstairs, pausing at the door to summon her "bright" manner.

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"Come on Bessie, I'm just off. We shall be late." No answer.

Leah opened the door. One to Bessie. She was sullenly staring out of the window, her cape in a bunch on the floor.

"Come on, I'm just off. We shall be late."

"You'd better go then." The figure at the window did not turn.

Business of diplomacy.

"Well, we might as well go together. 'Save the Dart's maid."

"Thanks ; I see you don't want me. I don't suppose anyone'll notice I'm not there." ("She's elementary," champed Leah to herself.)

"Oh, I say, don't be absurd. Who said we didn't want you? We—shall be awfully pleased if you'll come, of course."

But why the necessity to placate the girl? Anything for peace. "We shall just do it if you hurry. Oh, good! you've got on your green. It makes me look a dowdy wreck, but that can't be helped. Your cloak's on the floor."

Ugh! that awful frock! Fussy, gathered on the hips, up in front and down at the back, one of Miss Mitton's failures, displaying meaty ankles in "openwork" stockings——. Bessie was visibly recovering. Mrs. Bounce, immeasurably relieved, and telegraphing secret gratitude to Leah, watched them go. "Enjoy yourselves, girls!"

Appeased, Bessie strutted by Leah's side.

When the first diffidence had worn off, it be-

## PLAY

came a scramble as to who could create and serve up the most misunderstood personality to the company ; but the members invariably forgot, and the lapse would occur increasingly early in the evening. Generalities were touched upon ; "happiness" defined, each member contributing. "A rest you've really earned after work you honestly enjoy," said Leah, adding guiltily, "sorry to make a song and dance about it."

"To be champion of England," said Dicky Thurloe.

He wore a velvet jacket and a large loose tie. Cynthia chid him very charmingly for both offences, and re-tied his neckwear. With her, ancient Eve had triumphed over transient high thinking, and her "electric" blue semi-evening dress represented the best that Mallows, Monk's Green, could achieve.

"I'd like to marry," said Bessie. She was always a bar behind the conversational score. But the Circle was unmoved. It was "the thing" to have an open mind, and quite hopelessly "fubsy" to shrink from discussion of awkward subjects.

From mention of marriage, the talk veered with daring to "parents." "You can't fight fair with 'em," ruminated Angus Macmahon morosely.

The Circle drew him out, but he seemed grateful, relieved at unloading some of the congested thoughts of years.

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"There was always trouble at home," he added. "Father and the maids . . . no wonder my mother skipped it."

"Who with?" Cynthia's tone was flippantly tolerant. She was a little shocked.

"Oh, God knows."

"She'll come back after many years to claim 'her boy,' " Cynthia tittered.

"I very much hope not. I'm not used to being 'cared for,' and I don't want to get soft."

"But what did you think at the time? About your mother, I mean." Leah recognized Bessie's best "gentle" manner.

"Oh, Dad told me she was 'staying with friends,' and of course I believed it, being a kid. I got used to it after a bit, and then I forgot about it. There was no melodrama business. 'Sorry to be so boring——.' " He rose to go and his eye fell on Bessie. The girl in her ill-made green began calculating how she could time her departure to coincide with his, and avoid blatancy. Crudely she skirmished.

Leah noted her manoeuvres——almost before she had resolved upon them. Bessie was afraid of her. Leah moulded her at will. Bessie was an organ, and Leah had learnt her stops. By certain combined manipulations she could achieve foregone results. It amused her to do so.

On the landing, Bessie, guessing what was coming, waited breathless, the chill after the hot room obliterated by her excitement.



## PLAY

"You're a sweet thing," said young Macmahon, and gave her the kiss she was stamping for. She saw the affair ending in an engagement. She did not propose a meeting; her upbringing peered forlornly out on occasions and acted as a dreary brake to enjoyment. Besides, she hoped he would suggest the next move.

He offered her instead a taxi, which she nervously refused.

He 'saw' her to the top of Mimosa Road, and told her to 'take care' of herself, and Bessie, her shoes giving her hades, her elation dead, and her hair blown wispishly round her face, assented with a horrid jauntiness.

At the gate Leah overtook her. This finale was too good to miss. Bessie deserved it.

"Well"—light banter—"did you enjoy it?"

"Yes. It was great fun. When's the next meeting?" "Oh no you don't," thought Leah. This was intolerable. She would sooner resign than drag Bessie at her heels to future meetings. What a hide the creature had! Rage made Leah reckless.

They groped into the dining-room and Leah turned up the light.

"Well, you managed to scandalize them anyway." Leah smiled as she drew off her gloves.

"What do you mean?" Bessie was angry but anxious.

"Saying you wanted to be married; I

## FALSE GODDESSES

couldn't have done it—myself. Still, of course it was only us so it didn't matter."

Bessie gaped, furious.

"*Oh, you little brute,*" she said slowly. She banged upstairs kicking the rods at every step. Leah knew she herself was safe; this row would not percolate further. Bessie and Leah both knew that Mrs. Bounce would agree with Leah upon the subject.

She clicked off the light. She only left off smiling when she banged into the side-board.

Leah's own exit from school was not clean-cut. When it became obvious that the time was near she campaigned her last hours, grouped her audience, arranged situations. There should be exchanges of addresses, photos and souvenirs—or perhaps a joint gift from her class? Her portrait in demand. What a pity about Alison Taft; the child would have been useful with her clinging arms. . . . Should the class decide to combine in a present, Rebecca would have had to give too. What a score! But she was in a higher form; another world, now. She might conceivably leave first?

When the last day came, Leah was in bed with a chill. Ella attended, but did not seem to be conspicuously burdened with offerings when she came home. Between punctual spasms of pain Leah was grateful for this. She went herself two days later to collect her scattered property, and met no one but cleaners.

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Leah was now seventeen and a half and would not have left school for one more year but for the interweaving of another's ambitions with her own life. Ella, always the most imperious and tiresome of the sisters, had sprung a mine upon the family, and a crisis arose with which Mrs. Bounce felt totally unable to deal.

### IX

WHEN the Bounces and Leah left the High School for "good," none but the latter perceived that the pleasant, exciting emancipation, which chiefly meant to them leisured breakfasts at last, might be protracted into an intolerable and permanent hiatus.

Alice alone was catered for ; she had thumped the keys for months past for the privilege of doing so with pupils for the rest of her life ; Bessie was sleek with freedom, and the mornings, she thought, could be very acceptably dallied through in filling vases, flicking dust, and taking the dog for walks ; the afternoons with friends, *matinées*, and remnant sales in town ; the evenings at dances, the picture-palace, or, *faut de mieux* in the bosom of her family.

Ella was merely marking time, passionately anxious to be off on tour. She did not doubt that it would eventually make of her a London favourite. Cedric Vernon had been responsible

## PLAY

for this mischief, with a careless compliment and unremembered offer of work if ever she decided to 'dazzle London,' and had found himself confronted with the timid but determined apparition of Ella in his office, and forced to make good. After an interval, he put the tour in her way, and Ella, ignorant of theatrical values, snapped at it.

She ought not even to have left school, but Mrs. Bounce resigned, and hating to "spoil her chances," thought hazily of classes after the termination of the tour. Fortunately for Ella she knew nothing of the hazards of securing rooms; she did not picture her daughter wandering late at night in strange towns with lodgings not fixed up previously and the toss-up, when found, whether they will be clean, with aired bedding, to say nothing of respectability.

Vernon jotted down a list of reliable rooms, cautioning Ella against trusting to those who wave apartment-cards at the incoming train. He also placed her under the wing of the girl who was playing second lead, and begged her to "keep an eye on the child for God's sake!" Miss Taverner was bored.

This concession had been wrested at the cost of endless scenes. Ella, fighting for her way, was unhampered by tenderness. Parents were well-meaning obstacles who must be outwitted, overcome. In past years there had been a law concerning "no sweets before breakfast." This was the same idea, on a larger scale.

## PLAY

Parents—mothers particularly—had a devilish knack of putting their finger on one's most private pleasures. Ella supposed that, as with the sweets, they wished to dole out life's sugar-plums. Smilingly inculcating moderation. . . .

Ella knew perfectly that the talk of classes was only a palliative to her mother's conscience. Mrs. Bounce was weary of siege ; beside herself for her precious little daughter. At the price of defeat she bought back Ella's hugs and kisses.

This was all very well, and would mean for Leah more room to move in the bed-room, but it also meant that Leah's own schooldays must end. It was out of the question to continue while her junior was emancipated. She put it at once to Mrs. Bounce who, weakened with the great indulgence, had no more opposition left in her. It would only mean the household of women re-united in a lump instead of little by little. Leah was sorry to leave school, but it had to be. Realising that this was the time to strike while petitions were granted for the asking, Leah opened the question of her finances. Mrs. Bounce, with relief, instantly referred her to Mr. Bounce ; money matters were the man's affair. If there was one dispute he could settle all by himself, then let him ! Leah rather believed that Providence had arranged the stages of this petty revolution of Ella's in order to make things easier for herself. Who cared about Ella's tour ? Her own economic freedom was obviously the motive behind. Why, she

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might have gone on for years begging for fal-lals like Ella ! Coaxing set her teeth on edge ; that was Ella's great forte. When she whined for something coveted by herself and Leah, the latter always sided with Mrs. Bounce in an unflinching crusade against underhand methods. As often as not Ella's wish was granted, and with it, Leah's ; Mrs. Bounce was rigidly just. Leah, contemptuous of the methods that had obtained the object, always accepted its dual bestowal upon herself. But she would as soon have gone without it. It was loathsome to be associated with Ella's graspingness. Rebecca had provided the impetus ; Ella's little ways, accepted until now, clinched the matter. Surely at her age girls had their allowances ? Leah was foggy on the subject, had never talked of these things with her contemporaries. They belonged to the unknown country of "after school." They were on a level with "coming out." But now that Ella had speeded up her own and Leah's affairs, she was faced with the immediate necessity of premature investigation .

Tiresome little idiot ! chopping into other people's futures. . . .

The discussion with Mr. Bounce was straightforward, and on the whole satisfactory. Apart from the facts themselves as to her possessions, with which she would shape her life later, it made for self-respect to have a 'business' talk. She would probably make capital out of that afterwards to friends, and to the Bounce girls.



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Mrs. Lawrence sent a sum for Leah's keep which naturally the Bounces pocketed, and a further sum held by Mrs. Bounce for Leah's personal expenses. It seemed that the drafts, which were remitted through an Australian Bank and not by Mrs. Lawrence direct, arrived half-yearly and on no specified date. Leah, rejecting the majority of Mr. Bounce's statements, gathered that she was to consider herself in receipt of £40 a year, free of any Bounce claims. It used to be only £20 for her own wants, and the schooling money paid separately, said Mr. Bounce.

Leah went upstairs and thought. £40 meant to her a lump sum, and that would be a stupendous windfall to play with, had not the question of dress begun to nag her. Having money chiefly meant giving presents to people you loved.

There was no one at the moment. . . .

She alternated between the sensations of the *nouveau riche* and a growing conviction that the sum would not last her three months.

She had seen fur coats priced at eighty guineas. . . . She wondered if 'the others' knew, and resolved to keep them in the dark; then she told everyone.

Alice said she knew all the time. Bessie made Mrs. Bounce a scene until she too was pensioned off, in a lesser degree. Leah thought Bessie a rum 'un. She had all Alice's opportunities for collecting gossip about Leah's

## FALSE GODDESSES

affairs, but the only thing she clutched at was a tardy personal dignity, purchasable with cash. And yet she was not a snatcher, like Ella. Sulks and scenes were her means of expression ; she never cajoled. Leah did not think she had the brains for that. It had needed Leah's example under her very nose to goad her into action. Bessie was intensely imitative ; it was her only virile characteristic.

Ella took the £40 news with maddening condescension.

" I'm to get two pounds a week, and that's a hundred a year," she said, referring to the tour.

" The tour won't last for ever, or anything like a year, and out of your two pounds you'll have to pay for everything—except fares."

Ella was easily crushed ; Leah was the only person who could do it.

Bessie, beside herself, wrested £25 a year from the family exchequer ; that fact came out at once, she grumbled it savagely to the girls. News was always easy to extract from her ; Leah and Ella excelled at it. However unwillingly, it was always given, and Bessie left squeezed dry and resentful. " Let's hope the poor old thing never has to appear in court, they'd turn her inside out almost before she got a sniff at the Bible." Bessie amused Ella.

Bessie soon cheered up, and with ready money in her purse, confident, floral hats soon framed her face. From under these she stared with her customary air of sodden astonishment

## PLAY

upon the world. Temporarily united, Leah and Ella would rush away to giggle. Sometimes they chaffed her, but guardedly, "pulled her leg" at table, with a wary eye on Bessie, like the doctor who holds the pulse while the dentist administers gas. They did not intend to let themselves in for a storm, but there was fascination in going near the verge.

Her scenes were more terrible than Ella's, who might conceivably grow out of the habit. The others were loved in Mrs. Bounce's just way. She was inclined to lean upon her eldest daughter, but Alice, practising steadily, with a post in view, must not be troubled.

Leah, aloofly criticising, thought that Ella was as a gusty, cutting east wind, with plenty of wailing through key-holes, and capricious showers. Bessie's discontents were drouth, thunder muttering and menacing, the whole world oppressed, apprehensive. She rather thought that it was Bessie's maturity that made her inexcusable. Her unready tongue unloosed, venom stumbled out like a drunkard. Leah and Alice thought Bessie's lack of reticence appalling. Alice never admitted it; she would willingly have undertaken the easy job of shaping the girl and guarding her goaded mother, whom she loved, from the 'variousnesses' of Bessie and Ella; but there never seemed to be time.

Ella discovered it wasn't much fun commenting on Bessie's hats, because she seemed to like it. She loved being noticed, and would shift in

## FALSE GODDESSES

delighted consciousness. Leah and Ella assumed elaborate detachment; it was slightly amusing to watch Bessie wriggling for attention. Ella called her hats 'the lim'. Bessie's sartorial aspirations, as it were, began and ended at her head. Big, flower-laden 'trays' rocked above shabby coats and skirts. When she had a new dress she wore it until her family writhed at sight of it. Then Mrs. Bounce would expostulate against "scuffing out," and the garment would be sulkily hung in the wardrobe to re-appear, pulled and crumpled, on legitimate occasions only. She always rendered her shoes shapeless, and weary bundles were everlastingly in dock at the shoemakers. It was a common occurrence to see her in the drawing-room 'down to' coloured satin party slippers worn in conjunction with thick stockings.

There were no excitements about Alice's clothes. She merely wore 'quiet suits.' Mrs. Bounce took a firm line with Ella, and her daughter fretted but obeyed. "I don't get any fun out of nice things," she complained. "Mother *marshals* them so." It was true. Mrs. Bounce, anxious that she should look her best at all times, awarded best wear rather in the manner of a good conduct stripe. The result was that Ella was always acutely self-conscious.

Her affairs disposed of, Leah, feverish for action, decided to fill in with singing lessons. Miss Angela Strickland was a well-known and

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first-rate teacher ; she was secretly enchanted with Leah's possibilities. She had wormed the careless information from Leah that her mother was a singer, and told her that if she worked, there was no reason why she herself should not sing some day in Grand Opera. Leah's voice was full of latent power.

Fired with the discovery of this unexpected asset, Leah began to practice, straining her voice for hours at a stretch, and, expecting to be put on to operatic numbers after her sixth lesson, was completely put off the whole business when Miss Strickland kept her to a routine of voice-production, of seizing Leah's ribs and shrieking, "You're going up! You're *going up!!*"

So, to her increasing ennui, broken by fits of uncontrollable laughter, they yapped and popped at each other until the hour.

But Leah had been popped at and pushed about long enough, and suddenly ceased the lessons just as they were taking a turn for the better.

Coincident with this, the vicar of Monk's Green announced an entertainment in the Town Hall for his Sick Fund, and dispatched the curate with the best digestion to imperil it at tea-parties canvassing for talent. The Reverend Hugh Stacey, a nice youth and good football player, went swilling and begging down the length of Mimosa Road until he reached the Bounces.



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The family, save Mr. Bounce, were all in. Bessie, brightening visibly, after a dismal afternoon of trying to understand with the aid of fashion-paper flimsies the true inwardness of making a blouse ("cut down the dotted line"), Leah exhausted with a resurgence of hard work at her singing, on lines laid down by herself, and Ella, joyous, having perfected the few lines of her part. Mrs. Bounce, after a drabby matinée of pricing saucepans in the High Street, welcomed the young man, and, after having plied his protesting inn'ards with tea, he boyishly burst into the matter in hand.

"I'm told I shall find you all a very tower of strength," said the Reverend Hugh, with his best house-to-house manner, and producing a note-book, he ran over the list of promises for which he had, so to speak, bartered the coats of his stomach.

Mrs. Vernon had promised to tell stories and, if required, to give some of her low-life "cameos"; Wee Di——— (here the curate cleared his throat) was to contribute a "fancy" dance, he himself would sing, one of the Rice girls would "give" a banjo solo, and Cynthia Dart spoke of a classical interpretation of the mow-at-the-shadows-and-flop-on-the-floor type. This was not Stacey's description. The Reverend Hugh, seeking his fountain-pen, looked expectant.

"I'll accompany," Alice volunteered, with ready good-nature. Bessie, after endeavouring



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to recollect a school recitation, spoke of selling programmes. "You will recite for us of course, Miss Bounce?"—turning to Ella. The child, with professional nonchalance, said she would "do something." "And what may I put you down for, Miss Lawrence?"

A sudden resolve was born in Leah.

She would burst upon Monk's Green as an operatic star, and when, many years later, her name was a household word in Continental opera houses, she would look back with tender amusement at the unprepossessing barn, rude shelter of genius. She would even return just once and sing her most celebrated songs, make a little speech of gratitude and affection for the little room which had "given her her chance."

Leah carelessly answered: "Oh, a song I think," and burnt for the curate to go that she might run upstairs and rummage in her music-case.

She decided almost at once upon that Brock's Benefit of vocalisation, the Jewel Song, and hopelessly overweighted her undeveloped voice with its intricacies.

On the night, after an afternoon spent in shivering with nerves on her bed, she walked on to the platform, embellished by the curate's ideas on ferns and crêpe paper, and faced the public.

When she had finished there was a polite spattering of applause.

Leah descended the steps to a place that had been kept for her by the side of Mr. and Mrs.

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Bounce. And then Ella, in girlish muslin, walked to the exact centre of the stage, and, to Leah's stupefaction, gave a song and dance from some musical comedy that had hagridden the playground and cloak-room in the past, and rendered it with so much sprightliness, such conventional apeings of the lady who had first set London whistling it, that the audience could not have enough of her, in spite of the fact that her little voice was obviously untrained, and her dancing steps deficient of technique.

Leah sat stiffly upright. She was trying to postpone gauging the effect this evening would have upon herself. How *dare* Ella go marauding from her recognized little forte of recitation, and succeed in a line that she had never intended to make her own? It was poaching . . . it was unscrupulous . . . it was——un-economic.

And she, Leah, who "had it all in her," was an unremembered failure. Ridiculous perhaps?

And there was the going home to be endured; the sandwich-reminiscences. Leah realised the future; saw that Ella might conceivably come to be in request. And she herself could do nothing about it, was indeed impelled to a spurious warmth of appreciation. She had hopelessly given herself away by her own performance; Ella might hold that weapon in reserve. No, generosity was Leah's cue.

Leah, shadowed, apart from the family

## PLAY

group round the table, listened to the comments. Mr. and Mrs. Bounce seldom praised, but anyone could see they were pleased under pretence of "taking Ella down." And Ella consciously dominated, overwhelmed with her prettiness and youth. She was above herself. She praised everyone; how *good* Alice had been. "I always say a *good* accompanist is everything." And how nice Bessie looked, and nearly all the turns were ripping weren't they? Studious ignoring of her own. And was that real Opera Leah had sung? "Good Heavens"—with an affected shrug—"I could never do it. It was all I could do to get through my own!" Then she added "They seemed to—like yours."

Leah smiled brightly; it seemed to crack the skin of her lips.

And she had to sleep with all this. . .

But Ella would be gone soon for weeks, thank goodness. Of course it would be a great score if Ella was dismissed from the company for incompetence; but perhaps, on the whole it would be better if she remained in it. Any pettifogging success she might make would be a fair price to pay for her absence from home.

Leah now doggedly put all thoughts of singing from her.

Once at Anne's sagging garden studio Leah discovered that she could draw. She had of course begun with Anne, and then deliberately turned the sketch into a caricature so cruel, so

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funny, that it had awoken a fresh train of ideas in her mind. She set to work with enthusiasm, but in pursuit of some promising new interest, had left her drawing half-finished. She found that there was nothing flatter than an old enthusiasm. Anne, mired with modelling clay, said that it was comparable only to the endeavour to fan the embers of "a dead pash'."

Now, in the hiatus that once more threatened to dominate her life, Leah turned again to art in a spirit of defiance. Interest gripped her as she began a series of caricatures; before she had completed them, she began to map out a large portrait of Anne. Then the inevitable First Difficulty presented itself, and she returned, discouraged, to her singing. She found that, in the interval, her voice had "gone back." She bought new songs as a species of appetiser, but never learnt them through, though she sang the more effective passages very prettily; then overcome with lack of incentive and depression, she would drop it all for weeks.

She deplored her inability to concentrate as much as anyone.

## X

LEAH, with assistance, and constant reference to Mr. Bounce, opened an account at the family Bank. She amused the kindly and slightly

## PLAY

*épris* head cashier with her naïve ignorances, and reliance upon his every word. He asked disconcerting questions, which Leah, her face pressed against the grille, countered with flippancies. "How would you like it?", he would pause over blocks of notes. "Very much," she would answer, and they giggled together. Her pass-book was Greek to Leah, all her accounts she worked out on scraps of paper. To know "how the money had gone" gave curious satisfaction, but in all her tortuous processes, she generally forgot what she was trying to prove. It had been the same at school. Sums of the "I go into a shop and I buy" type would be set, and Leah would bring the answer out correctly, as far as figures went, only in farthings instead of butter. She discovered she had a few pounds to her credit, in addition to her allowance; her friend the cashier told her this in a bewildering and technical mizmaze of words. Leah wanted to draw it out at once, but was unable to express the desire in professional language. In any case, she "hated asking for it." Mr. Hawley, a mere youth, made her feel terribly young.

Alice secured a place as junior music teacher at the Monk's Green Academy of Music. She was to start with fifty pounds a year. From the morning she quietly left the house at ten o'clock with her case, while Mrs. Bounce nodded and smiled at the window, she was ruled out of family concerns. And Ella left one Sunday

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morning with a tremendous fuss and harrying of the household, to join the company at King's Cross. Her mother, packing a "treat" lunch, and cushioning her departure as far as lay in her power, hoped that she might be allowed to come to the station; but Ella diffused without actual words an atmosphere of discouragement, and, by a skilful disposition of her luggage, rendered a second in the taxi impracticable. Throned in the car, Ella was all smiles, and allowed herself to say those things her mother had longed to hear during the last days. Mrs. Bounce came up the path rather slowly, and did not appear until lunch. . . .

With Alice and Ella embarked upon life, the house seemed curiously moribund and permeated with a settled sadness. It seemed to Leah that the walls were sternly watching her in disapproval at her own presence there. Everything had happened too quickly. They had none of them had a chance . . . youth had not mellowed within that house. Leah thought, "it's always stagnation or explosion here." With characteristic detachment she did not regard herself as a youthful figure in this family; she was the perpetual observer, tasting life through her intermittent and passionate affections. Leah was miserable just now, in a superficial way. Bessie was out of the question as *souffre-douleur*. There was no hope of discoveries in that direction. They had not even the same friends. The Bounce girls and her-



## PLAY

self lacked talent or inclination to "pass on" girl friends. They had their own houses to which they went for tea, and such restricted intercourse, and kept to them. Ella's face was unknown in the Parley's drawing-room where Alice had a standing invitation, and played duets with the musical Parley daughter. Bessie had no visiting-list; she became known only through being seen in her own house on those occasions when hospitality was returned. Mrs. Bounce called the parties "working people off." There was a depressing lack of spontaneity in these entertainments. In this way Bessie secured occasional invitations from her sister's friends who did not see their way to excluding her. Leah drew an even closer net round her friendships. Ella said Leah never liked anyone under thirty. Leah brought little grist to the social mill, who might have brought the most. Old school-friends didn't count; all the Bounces knew them by heart. Mrs. Bounce was disposed to be uneasy at what she described to herself, in want of a fairer definition, as secretiveness. She carefully adopted a light manner over the question of Leah's mysterious attachments. "You must ask her to the house," she occasionally hazarded, when some new name percolated to the family, and Leah was looking happy. And Leah would brightly assent,—and somehow the tea-party never took place, and the name remained a name alone. Once, cornered, she had introduced "her latest," as Alice, untroubled

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by emotions, smilingly said to the Bounces. They had had tea in the garden, which Mrs. Bounce regarded as a treat. It was owing to this bribe that she imagined she had overcome Leah's curious unwillingness. Of course it had not been a success ; Leah could have told them that. She was sixteen then, and loves were fragile and needed incredibly careful handling. The central figure in that episode had been a member of the Dramatic Society's orchestra.

Miss Turner was a pale, passable girl of about twenty-six. Leah admired her playing at rehearsal, and from the instrument to the human agent behind was but a step. Doris Turner's shortcomings of looks, dress, and *savoir faire* had to be accepted, and, as the faint flame was assiduously fanned, they became entirely submerged. Miss Turner had no sense of humour, but Leah, after slight hesitation, poising over this new flower, decided that it would not match her type ; and anyway, she herself had enough for two ! Doris laughed in the right places several times. The family was assembled in force, and Leah introduced her friend with the shy reverences of the lover. Mrs. Bounce and Alice had "taken to" Miss Turner, and from the moment she crossed the threshold, Leah's ardour waned ; the bloom had been rubbed off with the Bounce's vigorous kindly hands. Leah had many failures. She closed it with suddenness ; "tepped off," Ella called it.

Leah did not mean to have her divinities

## PLAY

popularized by the Bounces ; in any case they were precarious enough ! She tried the ruse of never mentioning the names of those with whom she was, according to Ella, "*au mieux.*" Ella had been at the moment, at the feet of the French mistress at the High School, and was not making headway . Mademoiselle Flaubert was a character, and spurned adoration. She had a scathing tongue and treated her class like dogs. Their ardour was in flames, but they feared her more than God. Recognized methods of ingratiation were universally abandoned. She got more work out of the class than any other mistress. When Ella, faint with homage, laid her head against her desk, Mademoiselle dispassionately levered it up with a pencil, continuing the lesson as she did so. Leah, with a sarcastic half-smile, had entered the lists. Within a fortnight, Mademoiselle Flaubert kissed her behind the black-board. . . . It had been a strained fourteen days, and none of the girls believed her.

From the provinces Ella sent many incoherent letters and local papers, heavily marked where her own name occurred.

Leah belittled the whole affair and was acutely bored.

## XI

LEAH'S life for the next six weeks was deter-

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mined by the intrusion of what she regarded as an impertinently unimportant medium.

Mrs. Vernon, rustling in, begged somebody to escort Diana to the Varsity where she was to sing at an audition, and Leah, bored but polite, volunteered. It would consume half the morning, anyhow !

She and Diana, the latter clasping a large parcel, a thumbed roll of music, and a dispatch-case of leatherette, went to town by Underground and bus, mainly in silence. Diana leading, they passed through the swing-doors and into a narrow passage, past the sergeant's den ; two steps down, and pushing aside a dusty *portière*, they walked into gloom. Leah, her duty over, creaked on to a dress-basket and peered about her.

The stage was unexpectedly small, and the whitewashed walls added to the chill discomfort ; unwieldy " props " belonging to the current turns were pushed into corners. A lamp and a velvet table, fringed with tarnished gold and a medallion crusted with winking sequins, the whole mounted on steel supports, obviously belonged to a juggler. A large bamboo pole suggested some hurrying Japanese " family " of acrobats ; there was even a boat turned on end and a creel full of property fish. Leah managed to discover by reference to the labels on the dress-basket, that it was the paraphernalia of The River Picnic Sketch Co. A loose-box in the prompt corner, Diana told her, was the

## PLAY

quick-change room. It had no roof ; the lime-men could watch the girls and comedians in advanced stages of undress. . . .

Standing by a piano on the O.P. side was a thick-set man with a fat sardonic face. His silk hat was pushed far back ; he looked prosperous and patronizing. An older man with thin hair and nervous hands strummed with mechanical brilliance, breaking off to refer from time to time to manuscript sheets. Neither seemed to desire to get to business.

The herded masses of applicants talked cheerfully among themselves. Leah wondered why they did not approach the man who was obviously the controller of their chances ; some etiquette kept them from intrusion upon his advertised leisure. Nobody appeared to listen when anyone sang. She heard him tell a girl who was taking her music from the pianist that she was "too short." And he had heard her sing the whole song through in silence ; an encouragement that many had failed to obtain. It was very confusing. . . . "We'll let you know in a few days. Have we your address?" Leah thought, "I'm glad she's got the job." . . .

She watched the singer push her way out, looking composed. This happened several times, and the girls would leave, colliding with the incoming trickle of aspirants. It was, Leah thought, rather like a musical At Home,—with an inexplicably *macabre* element. Devita-



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lised. . . . And yet they were young and well-groomed ; better than herself, with shoddy exceptions. But while the address formula unevenly proceeded, she was curiously pleased for the girls' sakes. She imagined the home-coming ; their mothers waiting to hug and congratulate . . . they interested her. She began to listen to conversations. Many of them seemed to know each other. " Weren't you at Daly's the other morning ? " . . . " I don't believe they took anybody. " . . .

But they did not appear to be talking " theatre " to any great extent. She was at a loss to define the impression they conveyed ; a business-like lassitude ; a species of negative fearlessness in face of the rather awful ordeal ; some philosophy that was too disorganized to include jealousy of each other. . . .

A desire for enlightenment filled Leah. She wanted to take the nearest girl by the arm and wring something positive out of her. " Where do you live ? " " Who with ? " " Do you want to do big things on the stage ? " And, " How do you manage to dress so well ? " And above all, " What do you—all of you—feel about—all this ? " . . .

Two girls were leaving. One said : " I can't wait any longer. " " There's a voice-trial at the Shaftesbury at 3, coming ? " answered the other. " Yes. I've got a card for it. " And, as they went out, Leah's matter-of-course application of normal standards underwent a change.



## PLAY

It now seemed impossible to believe that these girls were factors in any home-life, even of such a ménage as Diana's. It was as though they must have miraculously sprung, in a Minerva-and-Zeuslike manner, "fully armed" from the head of—say a theatrical agent. . . .

Ultimately a voice was raised in a ballad of the my-garden-roses-you-and-love type; Marcus Ernst cut it short with a husky "who's next?"

The question seemed to Leah impossible of solution. Mr. Ernst had no list of names; but the same laws which restrained the girls from mobbing the manager before the audition began applied to the way in which they came forward, without vulgar, collective rushes, one by one, quietly detaching themselves, like penitents to the confessional. . . . Diana Vernon stepped forward. She handed a letter to the impresario which he casually opened and scanned. Mr. Vernon had procured her her chance through his firm. Mr. Cranbourne, of Cranbourne and Leicester, Theatrical and Variety Agents, was, through Vernon's secretarial capacity, at all times available for the placing across lunch-tables of relations and friends. The partners had done business with Ernst in the past, were keeping their eye on the producer, who might one day institute an agency of his own in connection with his ventures. The manager grinned, and shook hands with Diana; he wasted no time in giving her a hearing. She had changed her frock and

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put on pink satin ballet shoes ; she was clasping a large doll. Leah, craning to look, felt fiercely sorry for her. Poor little kid ! Mrs. Vernon ought to be ashamed of herself !

The pianist played a prelude. "One chorus," commanded Diana.

It was a grotesquely sophisticated exhibition. It seemed to Leah as if the soul of a departed eye-to-business *comédienne* had managed to insinuate itself into the body of a child, there, backed by years of experience, coldly to exploit its charm and appeal.

When Dolly-dear had been put to bed, and the last line, "sleep sweetly till the morn" had trebled to silence, the child walked composedly over to the manager and conferred with him. Then she returned to Leah. "Engaged, my dear ! And now I must positively fly and change." She ran off, occasionally gambolling upon her toes. "Next," croaked Mr. Ernst, and his eye fell gloomily upon Leah ; he had seen her with Diana. Unnerved she stammered "it isn't me."

The cigar was removed with deliberation. "Want a shop?" grunted Marcus.

"I? Oh—er"—

"Can you *sing* then?"

Here was something tangible.

"I——yes. I hav'n't brought one though." She was scared at the brusque way life was rushing upon her, and of the guise in which it rushed.

"Sing a scale then."

## PLAY

Leah complied. To herself her voice seemed clear ; it appeared to fill the theatre for her after its long rest. Marcus listened and stared with Hebraic impassivity.

“ All right. I’ll send you a call.”

She thanked him with an inexplicable humbleness. And so, in spite of herself, began a new epoch.

## XII

LEAH did not receive a call until the company had been rehearsing a week. She never saw Diana Vernon out walking now, she was rehearsing, her mother told Leah the morning they met in the baker’s shop. Mrs. Vernon had been taking her daughter to and fro for a week now, and was, in addition, in “servant difficulties,” she breathlessly explained to Leah. “ But I’m glad you two girls are to be there together, it’ll be company for you. ’Never bin on before? ’Daresay you’ll feel strange at first. You won’t see much of Baby though after the rehearsals are over, she’s with the other children in the Bally. I tell you I sh’ll be thankful when she’s over the licensing age ; it cuts into my evenings something shocking turning out at nine to fetch her, and her Daddy’s too tired to go after his work. Well—so long.”

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When the call did come, Mrs. Bounce propped it on the toast-rack, and Leah pounced upon it. She was feeling hurt with the management for keeping her out of the fun. . . It commanded her attendance at 12.30, which seemed odd. She never discovered whose mistake that was, but when she reached the Hall, she found the rehearsal in full swing.

When the scene had sorted itself in some measure, one of the first persons she saw was Adela Heathcote, a tall handsome girl whom she had often met at Anne Sleath's house. They had never taken to each other much. She had studied at the Gower Dramatic School, and was there considered a Shakespearean actress of promise. She was always given the best parts. Her rather austere personality, and inability to join in any fun, had imposed itself on the students, who took everyone at their own valuation. Her manner, when Leah pushed eagerly forward, suggested that, as they were both involved in calamity, they had better make the best of it.

"Hul-lo! What are you doing in this galley?" demanded Leah.

Adela Heathcote shrugged.

"Oh I wish to God they'd get on!" she broke out, consulting her wrist-watch.

"Come on. Salmon's in season," suddenly barked a voice from the stalls. Leah giggled. "Once through," continued the voice, "and then you can go to lunch."

## PLAY

“Everybody back in an hour,” shouted Marcus, when the chorus, heartily accompanied, was concluded. Thankfully the company pushed out of the swing-doors.

Leah only identified two of the girls who had attended the audition. The chorus boys, lounging in from the bar outside, did not impress her, with their hand-me-down suits and cheap hom-burgs. She thought one of them awful; he talked with strident “naows” and “haows,” possessed a brilliant fence of unconvincing teeth, and looked as if he slept in his clothes. He was in jovial conversation with two girls. She noticed that in the matter of talk he seemed to be doing all the work. The girls merely assented, or asserted. She supposed that as they were all earning together, the need for social blandishment was over? . . . He would break into brays of laughter at the top of a voice that would have done credit to a costermonger with a barrow.

“What is it?” Leah asked Adela.

“Fred Fillip. He plays headwaiter in the Restaurant scene, and works a number with Hall in the Carnival at the end. I saw them rehearsing it yesterday; it was rather stupid and full of gags they’d copied from Tosti and Vale—all that burlesque opera business. I heard it years ago,” said Miss Heathcote wearily.

Leah looked at her curiously. Adela—“The Heathcote”—had, she thought, rather “come

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on " since the old days. Viola and Olivia, and The Second Mrs. Tanqueray would be all the better for the experience !

The call next day was for 11. At a quarter past twelve Marcus " and suite " filed leisurely into the stalls where they talked for twenty minutes. In the interval between finishing one cigar and lighting another, he tossed an " opening chorus " to the company.

" I can't hear a word they're singing. What on earth's it all about ? " said Leah, when the show-girls came in to different music, nicely marking their status. Apparently Marcus shared her opinion, for he took the bâton from the conductor's desk, tapped, and the girls checked, as though shot, in mid song.

" I want to hear this," he roused. " Put your copies away, it's more than time you all knew it. Take it from me——no, start again. Give them the prelude Morley."

*" Hullo Audience, hullo !*

*" We're very pleased to see you here to-night,*

*" And we all hope that you*

*" Will find something bright and new*

*" And make many new pals*

*" From this garden of girls,*

*" Hullo Audience, hullo !*

*" With pleasure let us fill your cup*

*" And all be happy, jolly*

*" Put an end to melancholy*

*" Lights up ! Lights up ! "*

*Tap, tap, tap, tap.* " Who's singing ' We're very pleased to see you here to-night ? ' "



## PLAY

Silence.

"It's 'We're very pleased—pause—to see you,' and so on. Accentuate the 'Hullo Audience' in the first line; make it bright. *Hullo* audience, *hullo*!!! and so on."

They made another start. He stopped them.

"Some of you are hanging on to the 'lights up' too much. Don't sing 'Li-ii-ii-ghts up.' This isn't Grand Opera. It's 'Lights up, lights—pause—*up*'!!! shout it, don't sing it. Remember that. Again." He turned away. When the company, working now, had concluded, there was another wait while the discussion continued. At length; "Miss Marston. Isn't she here? What?"

A girl with a dead-white skin, who had been deep in conversation with one of the comedians in a dark corner, got slowly up and came down-stage. "Sorry," she said smiling. "What are we doing?"

"Just run through your number, Miss Marston," the manager smiled affably. "What's the first one?"

"'Little Miss Modiste,' " she answered indifferently.

"Just walk it, will you? You come on from the back right on the opening chorus. We'll have the doors up to-morrow. Now. You say 'Good morning, Sir,' to the Dude, 'Can I sell you a chapeau?' and Bentley—where the devil's Bentley?—Oh, for God's sake old chap! You say 'No, Miss, but let me be your

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chap, oh ! ' see ? Now. Stand by. Clear off boys. All in your places for this number. Now, er—lights up lights up," he muttered rapidly. Morley played the prelude, and Miss Marston strolled down-stage, hands clasped under her chin, her eyes on the ground. She was frowning with thought and humming her prelude. She sang under her breath, to save her voice, the chorus of mannequins as they would on the first night. The number itself had a catchy refrain and was full of innuendoes. Marcus Ernst knew his Varsity. Each chorus concluded :

*" But then I'm so modiste  
I'm a model sort of girl ! "*

and the whole concluded with a hat parade.

At the command, the girls began to pass across to the refrain. *Tap, tap.* " Stop it, Morley. That won't do ; this is a hat parade, not a funeral," he shouted venomously. " Take it separately. Miss —— you start and when you get here——," he indicated the centre of the stage—— " stop and turn your head half round, then walk off. When I say next, Miss —— you follow on at once. Keep it up. Keep it bright."

" Miss——" wearing a black velvet jockey-cap, swayed affectedly across, and vanished into the wings.

" *Next!!!*" Miss Heathcote followed on. She moved well, passing the ordeal unmolested.

## PLAY

The men were gathered upstage smoking. In one of the rests, Leah noticed a massive figure leaning against the piano. Idly she smiled at him. He instantly came over to her chair.

“Hullo, Fairy!”

“I’m so bored,” said Leah. “Come and amuse me.” She was enjoying herself. “This show seems frightful rot, doesn’t it?” she added.

Wayne Pritchard was playing heavy lead; she could not know that he was a personal friend of the management. She treated him as she might any port-in-storm derelict introduced at a party.

He smiled affectionately. The girl attracted him; so did her friend “the tall girl.”

But Miss Heathcote ignored everyone.

The jealousy of one of the show-girls became aroused against Leah. In the pause, Miss Baby Shayle would canvass her fellow syrens, endeavouring to inflame them against “the damned new girl.” She and Leah had taken an instant and instinctive dislike to each other. Leah kept this to herself. But her adaptability was strained to breaking-point. Adela didn’t seem anxious for anyone’s regard; but then even here she created a kind of atmospheric awe around herself. Leah put it down to her height. She knew she herself could never win out “in that way.” The social side was obviously her only chance. Over the matter of Miss Shayle and her emotions Leah found that her friends

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were inclined to "take her part." She was rather flattered over the whole business, although it was not pleasant to be cunningly shovelled out of place during the ensembles. And she did it all under the manager's eye ; Leah even trembled for her ! If Mr. Ernst noticed local scuffles, he said nothing that directly implicated Miss Shayle. . . .

No one jostled Adela ; Ernst gave her three lines in the hat-shop scene. These were cut out at the dress-rehearsal.

Leah discovered that her friends held no brief for her. She seemed, if anything, to be losing ground with them every day. Each morning brought them all nearer the time when they would be parcelled out in lots, regardless, and camped in dressing-rooms. It was, Leah thought, all right so far ; but she had already sensed the cold-shouldering power possessed by the girls. A power of combination used, apparently, in this direction alone, and which, if directed toward their common good, might conceivably place the management practically at their mercy. But it seemed to cut both ways. Trouble brought out their all of sympathy and caustic advice ; even their money. She thought it a pity you had to be in extremis, so to speak, before you could hope to get into touch with your neighbour in the line . . . but then on the other hand nothing was permanent or rooted . . .

A given time for lunch, then back on the stroke to idle for an hour or more. Rehearsal

## PLAY

till five o'clock, and the children, though never called for to rehearse, must remain. They had been patiently sitting on the stage since eleven that morning, and were dismissed with the rest of the company, having done nothing all day. None of the girls attempted to "mother" them, the feeling seemed to be that their presence implied emancipation. Leah, hesitating over the prettiest of the "poor babes," preferred on the whole to side with prevailing opinion. And they were really rather awful little beasts! If you spoke at all, it must be on an equality. They were perfectly capable of keeping their end up!

Diana, Leah noticed, fitted completely into the children's scheme. So far, she herself had barely spoken to the child. Diana had given her a critical little nod of encouragement at the first rehearsal, and had then become absorbed in discussion with her set. At other times she sat with her little fur coat thrown round her shoulders, and a suggestion of complacent ennui on her face; like a leading-lady—seen through the large end of an opera-glass. . . .

Mr. Ernst seemed incapable of preparing a definite plan of work from day to day. He tapped capriciously for whatever scene or number that occurred to him. Daily his company mustered in force from distant suburban homes, to curse, and watch the chorus, who filled any hiatus created by the principals.

As the *révue* shaped better, and the time to

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within a week of production arrived, rests grew shorter ; in the heat of last-minute inventions Mr. Ernst discarded hat, collar, coat and waist-coat. The choruses gained incisiveness, the dancers whirled, and were barely finished than "salmon" was laconically commanded.

Since the day of Leah's summons, the accompanying business had been constructed. Now the chorus wheeled on covered barrows dotted with little saucers in which lumps of pink cotton-wool would be placed on the first night. They even let down a "street" backcloth.

Suddenly in the middle of the scene, "I don't like that. Cut it out." The barrows were wheeled away while Mr. Ernst planned a substitute. The ballet fared no better. "It'll have to come out," he said intermittently right up to the dress-rehearsal.

Diana, in face of impending calamity, unbent to Leah as they went home.

## XIII

BOBBY Dainton, concealing the fact that he had been at Eton and Oxford, saw, in excursions into *révue*, an escape from the dullness of his country home. Everything amused him. He entered Leah's life at her elbow with a whiskey-and-soda, cakes, and entreaty in his eye. She had not noticed him before. He had strolled



## PLAY

into the Varsity at the last moment. He had seen the preliminary notice of the show in the *Era*, and, bored with the lunch offered him at the club, buttonholed Ernst even as he was stamping at his chorus. Ernst had engaged him at once, 'on his face,' and his latest recruit had rapidly assimilated the arrears of work, performing the movements with a bright grin and a crisp sense of time.

Soon Leah Lawrence was conscious that he was in love with her ; he guarded her from unspecified harms with every reverence of his nature. Sweets and cigarettes fell out of her dispatch-case. . . .

This was a new, curious, and slightly repellent experience. She was fond of Bobby and accepted the situation, of course ; to the seeker after knowledge he must offer up his best. Leah knew and cared nothing about the 'management' of men of which she heard so much and read more. She snubbed and encouraged him turn about. Even the heavily over-womaned atmosphere of Mimosa Road had never quenched her partizanship of her own sex. Familiarity had bred preference. Bobby was an innovation. She had no system, let him kiss her whenever he wished. She saluted this necessity who exacted such tokens from others. Luckily she had fallen into good hands. Dainton was a gentleman. She never mentioned his name in the Bounces' home.

He grew daily more depressed and self-

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abasing. From the day he joined the company he had spoken openly of his feeling for herself. Leah thought it all very interesting and rather pathetic. She was uneasy for his sake, much in the way his own mother might have been, that he should have fallen into the power—for that was what it amounted to—of such a specimen as herself. In the words of the lower classes, they had “picked each other up” . . . poor Mrs. Dainton! . . . She experienced little of the fabled joy of being loved; rather she felt a faint contempt for Bobby for being so easily ‘taken in.’ And he made her feel a fool. Leah had grown accustomed to doing the spade-work of love. Bobby, glorying in it, had taken her employment from her! But she soon learnt to fall into step with the new régime. There were spaces in which she was content to relax in the peace of it. . . .

As rehearsals grew later, and regular meals impossible, tea-parties were formed on the stage and would consume on baskets, boxes, and even on chairs, food fetched from an Italian restaurant opposite the hall by Bobby Dainton. Leah and Adela had their own coterie. Even Diana had become entangled in an affair with a chorus boy, and it was never safe to look in suddenly at any dark corner. The stairs, Dainton said, were now surprise-packets, and places to be avoided by the strait-laced.

Leah would occasionally accompany him out to lunch as a reward for ‘services rendered.’

## PLAY

There was always Pritchard to fall back upon, in case Bobby began to be a bore. She and Bobby came in for plenty of chaff. "Now you're married we wish you joy," sang one of the girls, as Miss Lawrence and Mr. Dainton turned down the alley to the stage-door after lunch. The singer had come out of the Ladies' Saloon Bar of the public-house opposite with one of the comedians.

Leah wrote at this time to Anne Sleath :

*"Congratulate me Anne! I've got a job in a chronic revue called 'Lights Up.' Don't have a fit! I nearly did when I got it! They say its booked at the Varsity for several weeks certain, and then it'll do a tour of the suburban halls, anyway it'll be in town for ages before going to the provinces. I sha'n't go if it does unless they give me a part. They are an awfully jolly lot and we have huge fun. Adela Heathcote is in the chorus. I was simply floored to see her in a show like this!"*

and so on.

Anne replied :

*"Many congrats old child on securing a job.. It sounds all right. Life being a dreary desert as we have so often agreed, I have been doing some film work at the Middlesex studio down at Kingston, a ghastly journey. I made myself affable (as is my way) to the producer, an old bird with a roving eye who chirrups to the name of Petley, and lo! he did give me a part. I have just had a frantic search for your letter but ran it to earth in the sink where I always look when in despair."*

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Three days before production, the question of a new title for the *révue* was mooted, but "Lights Up" was finally adhered to. Some friend of Mr. Ernst's suggested that it would be "rather a novelty" if the opening chorus were sung in darkness until the words "lights up," when the scene could be legitimately illumined in one dazzling flash. The idea was adopted.

"I should call it 'The Morals of Marcus'" giggled Leah.

"OR, 'The Importance of Being Ernst,'" said Bobby Dainton.

The chorus was despatched to the costumière's.

"You'd better be undressing while I fit these," said Madame, taking trails of filmy mauve from the attendants. The girls were fawningly enthusiastic.

"I hope we have lots of time to change; the restaurant scene comes bang after the bally an' we're all on in it for the tablo, my god!" Then Miss Baby Shayle caught sight of Miss Lawrence and stopped smiling.

"Oh I say, take me next dear, I shall nayver get to the Corinth in time an' I bin fined twice this week. Don't these rehearsals make you sick?" The auburn-haired girl, working in a musical-comedy at another theatre, would have barely worked out her notice before the Varsity *première*. The girls were posed in the positions they would take up when the curtain rose. Madame had costumed former productions for

## PLAY

Mr. Ernst ; he was expected any minute. The fashionable figures suggested to Leah the half-unconscious attitudinizing of dinner-guests before the gong booms a release. The salon, large, and cherishing an effect of home-like informality, heightened the resemblance. The chorus stood, carefully, for three quarters of an hour before the manager appeared. The smoke of his cigar permeated the room ; as it was not, strictly speaking, a rehearsal, he did not remove his hat. He appraised the sniggering girls with a sort of saturnine content while the modiste palpitated round him, or darted forward to push some girl into position. When Madame spoke, Mr. Ernst did not actually refuse to listen . . . he even bent his head to her level to have a remark repeated.

Leah's frock for the hat-shop scene disappointed her. Somehow, the best hats and frocks had been picked before she was ready. She supposed the others had some sort of an understanding with the black-gowned, golden-haired elderly head of the establishment. They certainly exchanged business-like reminiscences, obscure references. . . .

Madame had offered Leah no choice of gown or hat. She gave Leah the impression of finding her personally uninteresting. Miss Shayle, on the other hand, and two of her friends, had had, apparently, not only the pick, but had quite privately taken gowns from someone else. It was an educative lesson in chicanery. And

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there was not a suspicion of any unpleasantness from the victims.

In her singularly tasteless costume—for the house was, in its private moments, a reliable and modish one—Leah did not imagine she would shine. In her hat, an abomination in orange-coloured tulle which clashed to excruciation with her pale hair, she thought she had never looked plainer. Now in Miss Shayle's triumphant model of silver gauze and black cock's feathers, she had looked singularly striking. She had tried it on furtively while the owner was undressing in one of the little cubicles. . . .

The fitting of the costumes for the "Beautiful Night of Stars" number was soon disposed of. Economy had been exercised in their design and execution. As the song was sung in twilight, Madame had agreed that the 'practicable' moon would "soften" the effect of what was little more than fish-netting cut into jags. It didn't matter even if they fitted, if they were long enough to cover the carnival dresses.

When Miss Shayle saw Miss Lawrence as a French clown, she raised her eyebrows at a friend, and quite unobtrusively said "Christ!" Then she drew the rest round her to comment on her own garment. Leah turned white; but then they had been rehearsing since ten-thirty that morning, and Marcus had turned up in time, and it was now six-thirty. The assistants were shrouding the smaller show-rooms.



## PLAY

Her legs were dully aching ; all the same it was fun, terrific fun, she told herself. She sat down, and looked round for Adela Heathcote. Authority had gowned her friend with instinctive regard to the impression she created. Catch Adela being made a fool of in a scarlet curly wig with a cameo gibus secured by an elastic ! Leah, catching sight of her peaked little face in a pier-glass, so garnished, exploded in a laugh.

Then final rehearsals with scenery still left to the imagination, although one or two properties began to creep in. Carpenters and electricians hammered ceaselessly ; they had survived many such *melées*, had seen many reputations gained and lost. Half the company was suffering with feverish colds which bred on the draughty stage. One or two, including Leah, lost their voices, and were reduced to moving their lips whenever the manager's beady eye turned in their direction.

## XIV

THE dress-rehearsal was perforce held at midnight owing to the performance at the Varsity. Adela and Leah ran up many flights, which smelt of pipeclay, tobacco, and drains, to the dressing-room. All the best places had been

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taken, and they found the usual dearth of hooks, which were loaded with the *révue* changes, and lack of looking-glasses, and chairs. Most of the chorus had brought their own glasses, which they propped upon open make-up boxes.

They insinuated themselves into half their fair share of space on the long wooden ledge, to be greeted with a "Here move along you! You can't expect to have the whole place to yourself," and "My God! don't upset my candle," from their kimono-clad neighbours.

The room itself, which could comfortably have seated twelve, now contained twenty girls, a dress-basket, the changes, and piles of outdoor clothes.

In the rooms below, the men roared comic songs.

As the evening wore on, the language in Leah's room became a thing to marvel at, and the unventilated atmosphere thick with odours of humanity and greasepaint. Chaos prevailed. Clothes and tempers were lost. The milliner had sent two assistants, who quietly sorted hats and frocks lifted out of the hamper. The dresser churned her way round the room trying to satisfy five vociferations at once.

"I don't think I can stand this," muttered Leah to herself, running about to find an inch of space in which to put her coat, hat and furs. Even the wash-basin in the corner was full of gloves and shoes.

She made up standing, dodging her head from

## PLAY

side to side in the hope of getting a glimpse of herself in the glass which was squarely blocked by two girls in camisoles and knickers. Thankfully she descended in the futile creation and tulle hat, which she had placed at a daring cant. She thought that she resembled a kitchen-maid on Hampstead Heath, but she was complimented by Pritchard and petted by Bobby Dainton, miserably jealous.

Pritchard was attired as a Naval Officer, and looked well, in a *passé* way. Bobby was an *attaché* from some unspecified Wardour-street Principality. She looked at them amazed.

"What on earth have they got on uniform for?" she enquired of Adela.

"Why——er——the restaurant scene I suppose."

Owing to the way in which the scenes had been rehearsed, Leah had formed no connected idea of what, if anything, the show was about. She spent that night in a perpetual state of astonishment at episodes she did not seem to have seen before. The scenery added to the strangeness, as did the numbers, now tentatively rendered by the full orchestra, who, accustomed to blaring chorus-songs, made at first a singular hash of the witching nuances of the ballet music. They dragged, they hung fire, with sonorous unearthly brays from the trombone. Leah shivered with feeble laughter.

"Will I do?" she said, giving both hands to Pritchard.

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“Very nice, little girl.” He gave her a shop-soiled ogle.

If the pauses between numbers had been long at rehearsals, to-night they were endless. No one seemed to expect to begin. The chorus passed in informal review before Mr. Ernst, who was in the stalls with sample posters awaiting selection for the embellishment of the Varsity’s dingy exterior.

Leah had been the first down. Even the icy stage was preferable to the girls upstairs, and anyway it wasn’t quite so bad now the lights were on. They would faintly warm the place in time. Mr. Ernst passed her without comment, he had seemed to admire Miss Heathcote, although he did not commit himself. He bandied a joke with Miss Shayle, and the others got off with monosyllables or grins when they made their tardy and brilliant appearance. Leah noticed it all, she had an idea that mental notes of these graded receptions might help her to comprehend everybody’s standing in the theatre.

The full lighting effects were not attempted. Leah and Adela struggled with incipient influenza. Mentally they were rapidly exhausted; it was excitement alone that saved Leah from physical collapse.

“You do look charming to-night” murmured Bobby Dainton.

“Not in——this hat!” answered Leah, flipping it at him on its elastic. When it broke,

## PLAY

she leapt upstairs and mended it with a safety-pin looted from somebody's place.

She ran into the arms of Pritchard, who was waiting for her at the foot of the stairs.

"Ah, at last!" he whispered. "Give me a kiss little girl."

"But why?" said Leah, interested.

"Oh——of course——don't if you don't want to." He fell back a step, annoyed.

"Oh——well——," Leah kissed him gingerly while he said something she could not catch. She did not wish to be disobliging, and the old beast was only an old fool! She danced off in search of further amusement. . . .

At two o'clock, an unostentatious move was made to the bar where hot drinks were served at the expense of the management. They had left off at the ballet, the girls flitted in in chiffon, bare-legged and in dressing-slippers. The children were sitting with their mothers in the stalls. Mrs. Vernon and Diana were having a picnic in the third row; the japanese hamper was full of paper bags, and they drank in turns out of a thermos. The mothers, Leah noticed as she joined the queue at the bar, had wrapped up their kiddies, and the sleepy ones bunched inert against their shoulders, their bright eyes peeping open, fighting against sleep. . . .

Pritchard advanced upon Miss Lawrence bearing steaming comfort; he collided with Dainton, who hesitated, and withdrew.

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"I was looking for you." He handed the cup.

"Oh, thanks so much. Hi! Bob! don't desert your pard!"

At four o'clock, the rehearsal drew to a scumbled close, and the company was faced with the problem of getting home. The management was obliged to pay for taxis, and there was an universal hustling into clothes. Garments mislaid at the beginning of the evening now were definitely lost. Their owners were too light-headed with fatigue to care. Sketchily dressed, with make-up indifferently wiped off, they emerged into the grey, unearthly stillness of the Strand. It possessed a dignity entirely alien to its working hours when seen in the half-light of the coming dawn. . . .

Leah Lawrence and Miss Heathcote, the former in shoes but no stockings, and the latter revealing the absence of a blouse under her fur coat, anxiously scanned the thoroughfare for a conveyance. The pavement and road was filling with groups similarly occupied. One of the show-girls was reclining in a car at the wheel of which crouched a male figure muffled to the ears. Miss Vincent said: "How many can we take?" to the driver. Kicking aside rugs, he stood. "Where's everybody going?" The girl leant over the side. "Anyone for Piccadilly? Or Knightsbridge? We're going to Golder's Green."

They sorted claims. Miss Heathcote lived



## PLAY

with her mother at Swiss Cottage, Leah arranged to be dropped at the Piccadilly Tube. It was past five now ; she thought the trains would be running in another hour, anyway an immediate rest, even of five minutes or so, was the immediate necessity. They climbed in ; two girls and a man hung on to the doors ; three more found room inside. Half asleep, Leah found energy to chuckle at the spectacle they presented, had there been eyes to see. Six painted and dishevelled females racing, shameless, through the silence.

In the east appeared a faint, chill primrose light. . . .

## XV

THE management, Leah realised at lunch time next day, had omitted to inform the company at what hour they were expected at the hall. Mrs. Vernon and Diana were out shopping when, lunch over, she went next door for information. The maid-of-all-work offered little enlightenment beyond the tentative remark that 'igh tea was at ar parse six. Leah approached Mrs. Bounce upon the subject of a similar meal for herself ; and the latter sighed faintly, and said she would see what could be done, and Leah mustn't mind not having soup, and perhaps they could make a better arrangement later. She was a firm stickler for sane meals.

## FALSE GODDESSES

The *Daily Mail* was not much help.

THE VARSITY.—Every evening at 8. TO-NIGHT Mr. Marcus Ernst presents an original *révue* entitled “Lights Up!” with Miss Tabsie Marston, Wayne Pritchard, Chinley Waggoner, Varsity Kids, and a host of pretty girls.

Preceded by varieties.

Leah's tea-supper, a species of unhappy-marriage of unusual elements, seemed to choke her. At half-past six she was in the Strand. She did not so much hurry as hurl herself along. Passing the yawning waste that was the Tivoli, she speculated upon the turns that once had lived, and dressed and had their being and their day where now *débris* was heaped . . . surely the place must still possess vital vibrations? . . . She thought that, should a private dwelling ever arise over the spot, comedians would haunt it, be discovered in the drawing-room, or in the bed-rooms, making up. . . .

The Varsity was now bright with posters of turns; but the *révue* dominated the whole. Unexpected crannies were hung with framed photographs of the principals as they had appeared in past ‘successes.’ She stood and counted the turns. Five, and an overture (*Zampa*). She had no idea how long the *révue* would play; they had never had a non-stop run through for timing.

As she was turning away, Bobby Dainton came out of a tea-shop. He saw her, and hurried joyously forward. He exclaimed:

## PLAY

"You dear! Have you had something to eat?"

"When ought we to be in?"

"Oceans of time. I shouldn't think you wanted to get in a second before you need!" They strolled along, Leah was quieter now, but the measured pace he set was agonizing. She was a mass of excitement and sickly apprehensions. But Bobby soothed her, as he had never yet failed to do.

"Well, what do you think of our posters? Modest, what? Shrinking little E!"

"Rotten, except that one of Miss Marston with the futurist design of hats all round her. The others are so full of detail that they convey nothing to one. One wants a poster one can take in at once from the bus."

"I fancy our Hebrew fairy doesn't mean to keep the one you like. I heard him tell Morley that it was too quiet, but he loved the one of the waiter kissing the girl—you know, the one with 'A Bird in Hand' written underneath; he means to have it enlarged to cover the whole front."

"Of course. He would."

A shower swept the pavement in a silvery gust. Stimulating queues now waited, and there were nudges and comments as they turned down the passage. A piano-organ was playing over the way.

*"Tinkle tinkle tinkle b-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r (arpeggio),*

*"Chunk chunk, Click! (tune changed)."*

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The dressing-room now looked tidier, the dress-basket was gone, and a long table had been brought and placed down the centre by the sergeant, who also sent up two chairs for Miss Heathcote and Miss Lawrence. He had elected to make them his favourites from the first rehearsal. The good-natured old dresser presently came in with a cheery greeting. Miss Heathcote was the next arrival. Mrs. Trumpet rambled down the passage with a "Well,—you won't want me just yet lydies."

"How much does one give her?" Leah lowered her voice.

"Sixpence on Saturday night, and a disgraceful imposition too."

"I thought it was a shilling?"

The other laughed contemptuously. "So it is—in a decent theatre. You don't want to give her more than the others, do you?"

Leah hastily disclaimed, and changed the subject.

"How much d'you think she gets a week, poor old thing?"

"As little as they dare offer. They save her salary out of us. We practically pay her; they count on that."

"And what am I to give John?"

"What you like; he's been jolly decent to us. Half-a-crown'd do; I shall give him five shillings when I leave."

A modified repetition of the previous night began.

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Wiser now, Leah came on to the stage in a thick dressing-gown. Adela, who had worn hers at the dress-rehearsal, discarded it minutely to examine herself in the full-length mirror near the scene-dock. A bearded foreigner stood talking to Morley, the pianist. Leah was conscious that he was staring; he had fixed his eyes on Miss Heathcote, and was muttering to his companion. Later, John, the sergeant, handed her a card. "It's an invite Miss," said John, husky and grinning. Miss Heathcote glanced at the card without emotion. She retained it listlessly.

"I told 'im you was engaged for this evenin'. Don't you go Miss. I seen too much o' that there card business," said John. He was thinking of his children at home.

"Thank you John," said Miss Heathcote, quietly.

"Thank *you* Miss." The sergeant departed with a world of kindliness in his sunken eyes.

"I say Miss Heathcote, you're doing well! 'First evening of production, too. Engliss womarn, you lov' me, yes? no?" hissed Bobby. "But honestly," his eyes fell on Leah, "if there's any nonsense at any time I can always be there to see you home—or anything."

"Oh, help! Bobby! She's not Amelia Sedley!" Leah was impatient.

"No, no, I know. But—well you never

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know. Oh I don't mean to suggest that there's any chance of a melodrama that you can't manage for yourselves. These chaps always know who they can try it on with, and if the girls go out to supper with the first sweep that takes a fancy to her from the front, they've only themselves to blame."

Now the show was working in harness with the regular bill, quiet was imperative, and Mr. Ernst leashed until "Revue" flashed out on each side of the stage, and the power which he had enjoyed for weeks, and which was now wrested from him by a famous——shire comedian, became his once more. But at last the comedian walked off, the glittering curtains clashed to, his front-cloth was rolled up, and then——pandemonium.

A shouting cursing crowd of scene-shifters unrolling the carpet, stands of hats rushed on, the dainty chorus straggling down to get horribly in the way, to be pushed by brawny hands intent on urgent business, to trip over weights, and get nearly crushed by the rapidly-descending back-cloth, with its flimsy doors.

In a quarter of a minute Mr. Ernst dismissed several limelight men and a scene-shifter, in a torrent of abuse. They were stolidly indifferent. Order was at length restored, the hands cleared off, and, dulled by the thickness of the curtains, came the well-known music, of which the now confident orchestra rendered a selection of the most catchy numbers. With a word of encou-



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ragement, the recovering Mr. Ernst passed out to his box.

The girls scurried to places ; “ R-rrumble,” went the drums, out went the lights, the curtains swished apart, and the music burst at them, drowning their voices. . . .

## XVI

UPSTAIRS, in stifling number 13, began a cheerful uproar of screams, laughter and criticism as the girls prepared for home.

The door suddenly burst open, and the last arrival, a futurist pierrot, struck an attitude.

“ Girls,” she screeched, “ *there’s a call for to-morrow !!*” She smote them to silence. At last : “ What bloody sauce,” snarled Miss Shayle, unpinning a glittering band from her silvery curls. Then the chorus of comment was loosed.

“ Damn him ! P’raps he’d like us to sleep in the blasted place to be ready sooner in the morning.” The slender-legged speaker smeared her pretty face to commonplace with grease from an enormous tin. Miss Shayle capped it with a remark that brought Miss Heathcote to her feet, composed and icy.

“ Miss Shayle, we don’t want that kind of thing here or I shall speak to Mr. Ernst.” It was the misguided superb. Into her fine voice

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she had thrown the additional weight of past elocution lessons. The girls exchanged looks in which genuine bewilderment gave place to scorn. This was unheard of. Several of them had worked together under Ernst's management before, while the new recruits were, on the whole, acceptable. There had been, certainly, one or two girls who were "queer," but they had never gone down from the front, or with the management, and had generally got their notices, thank God!

When she could speak, Miss Shayle said: "Oh, my Lord, girls, say your prayers, there's a lady among us. She'll report you all to the management!" Turning away, she remarked to the girl sitting next her: "Did you hear that?" Miss Vincent did not answer. She rose, grabbed her purse and gloves, blew out her candle, called "good-night s'Trumpet," to the dresser, who smiled and responded. She rushed to the door, jarring the table and upsetting Leah's glass which crashed to the floor and broke, with a careless "sorry kid!" then slapped a friend upon the back with an affectionate "Bye-bye, bitch!" and slammed out.

Leah picked up the glass; she was trembling. The girls associated her with Miss Heathcote; she thought Adela had gone rather far. . . .

She herself had lost ground with Miss Vincent, the motor episode had not been the thin end of the wedge after all. Miss Vincent didn't

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seem to recognize her ; the " kid " was a concession to accident. . . . Leah, catching someone's eye, smiled timidly. She felt publicly disgraced by Adela's action. . . .

Once outside the room, she almost clung to her. They were both pariahs. . . .

In the congested passage to the street they found Bobby Dainton, who had performed a quick-change in order not to miss Leah Lawrence as she came out.

" Oh here, save me," she muttered to Miss Heathcote. She wished to talk over the evening with Adela. " I don't want to go home with Bobby, he always insists on coming miles out of his way—I let him once, after rehearsal."

" You've only yourself to thank. You have encouraged him. You let him kiss you."

Apparently Adela was not too upset to meddle in other people's affairs !

" Oh everyone kisses Bobby ! besides, he's not the only one !"

Adela answered conclusively : " He's not like the rest. You don't want to make him unhappy."

" I'm sure I don't know what he expects ! I think I've been jolly nice to him !" Leah blew a kiss to John, who beamed and saluted. " There he is waiting. Oh—*do* something !"

" Say you're coming home to supper with me," suggested the other contemptuously.

The trio walked to the station ; Miss Heathcote conscientiously gave her invitation. Mr.

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Dainton found himself deserted on a wind-swept pavement.

In the lift, and on the platform, Adela was unapproachable.

"What did you do about that supper-card?," Leah tried.

"Tore it up, of course."

The train roared out of its black circle that was the tunnel, creating steady gusts of cool yet stuffy wind.

"But you kept it when John gave it you?"

"You can't offend them." She spoke authoritatively.

Leah thought she was becoming as incomprehensible as the others.

It left her feeling singularly deserted and childish. Dear old Bobby!

Leah was allowed breakfast in bed the following morning. Bessie, a little crustily, brought it up together with the *Daily Mirror* and a letter which arrived by a messenger-boy. Bobby of course; wailing over last night. But it was, she realised, her first love-letter.

The eleven o'clock call dragged on, lunchless, till three. The company was apathetic, and the work, now the show was launched, lacked point. The jokes ("give it out, Waggoner, you'll get a laugh on that!") seemed shamelessly stale. No one seemed to know if the show was a success. Bobby told Leah he thought it was, as the humour was written in, apparently, while the Censor slept. Leah said she "didn't under-

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stand it," Miss Heathcote said she tried not to listen. Even Mr. Dainton professed himself "floored" by the very local allusions which the audience simply "ate," and which provoked knowing laughs all over the house.

During the progress of the first week, the chorus settled down in the dressing-rooms, and personalities began to emerge. Leah attempted amenities which were stared down, or went unheard in the chatter. Little Miss Dane had attracted her; she was pretty and quiet looking, but Miss Dane, she soon discovered, initiated the stories with Miss Ellis, the oldest woman in the room. They capped each other, once they began. Leah tried not to listen, but it was always possible to catch the scabrous beginnings; and the trying to elucidate them for oneself was the worst of all. She became morbid in the oversexed atmosphere. She began to wait for the stories and enjoy them; would have bettered them to win approval, only she knew none.

Treasury was paid after the Saturday matinée, and the carnival revellers gathered laughingly outside the loose-box. "No wonder they pay us in the change-room," said Baby Shayle, rather wittily.

Leah entered in her turn. Mr. Ernst gave her her salary and her notice. "I shall have to cut down the chorus". . . Oh well! she might have known it! Life gave her no time to test its possibilities; it offered disagreeable preliminaries and then turned her off. She believed

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there was a quality about her that attracted misfortune. . . .

She returned to the dressing-room, clasping her envelope, and it seemed desirable, the girls, in their crisp frocks, like very old friends. . . .

Bobby received the news in stunned disgust. Leah was too upset to be flattered. Adela, pressed, gave aloof sympathy. But there had been other surprises and indignations. Even some of the principals were weeded out. They were wonderfully soon forgotten in the shifting and shuffling. New scenes, songs, and business were constantly introduced. The Hat-shop scene was transferred to the end, and the curtain now rose on the carnival. Rehearsals were held every morning.

"If this show had a plot," said Bobby, "it wouldn't be possible to turn it upside-down, and for it not to be a penny the worse." "They seem to make a virtue of its being all about nothing," answered Leah. "Think of the critiques you read after some new *révue*! 'This bright little show possesses frankly but the frailest of plots, which in later scenes is entirely lost sight of; but it is the medium for much excellent fooling from Messrs. Green and Gage, and agile dancing from the Six Starfishes.'"

Leah's last night came.

"D'you like leaving?" asked Baby Shayle, powdering her arms.

"Damnable. Have a port with me," said Leah.



## PLAY

“Why, how d’you know she’s going?” shrilled another girl.

“She told me!” answered Baby, winking at Leah.

And so back to Mimosa Road.

## XVII

THAT night Leah slept soundly. In the morning, the position she had envisaged descended remorseless and accurate upon her.

The family gathered round the breakfast table, and the first bomb burst.

“Well dear, you’re not going back to the theatre any more then? We shall have you for supper, as usual, that’ll be nice.” Mrs. Bounce poured tea.

Mr. Bounce’s contribution was more deadly.

“You’ll hardly know what to do with your evenings. You’ll be quite the lady of leisure now.”

But the best for the last.

“And what are you going to do with yourself all day?” Alice always tried to enter into as much family life as she had time for.

Leah answered: “Oh, I’ve simply Heaps to get through; there hasn’t been a minute what with rehearsals——.” She even smiled brightly; but her teeth gritted, and the hot, facile tears filled her eyes. Shamed, she left

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the table before anyone had finished. The door closed on the family ; she stood forlornly in the hall . . . there would always be Bobby. . .

Her parting with him had taken place in the dim dustiness that was the scene dock. They had picked their way gingerly to each other ; too hasty movements would have been attended with farce. Holding Leah to him, he had impressed the temporary nature of the parting upon her . . . and now she was drifting about the hall. . . .

This was Sunday. Sunday ! Obligatory church. But the problem of after-lunch confronted her. But after all, it was quite legitimate to rest on that day.

She had visualised unease before, from the moment she left school in fact, but the accidental intrusion of the Varsity episode into monotony she had construed as the beginning of life. Its abrupt termination left her unprepared. Well, for the moment the machinery of domestic life must be worked to the uttermost. But she was not a Bessie, or an Ella ; the freaks of the latter were only a flash in the pan. For that matter she was not an Alice. Routine was not for such as herself ; Alice was an excellent cog in the wheel ; was of the type that is always ' happy in her work ' . . . . .

On Monday, Leah came down late for breakfast in order to fill in an hour dressing and doing her hair after the meal. But her toilette took less time than ever it had seemed to take before,

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and the servant was clamouring outside to come in and "do" the room. There was still the washing to put down. That took five minutes.

Leah went downstairs to lure the dog from his kennel for a walk, but she collided with Bessie whose copyright she was infringing. She could not dispute the point as she would dearly have loved to do, in case Bessie, who had a certain brutish directness that "got there," crashing through finesse, should ask her reasons for her sudden solicitude for Nero's welfare. She stood speechless, facing Bessie over the kennel top. Finally :

"Oh are you taking Nero out? I thought I would." But Bessie possibly had her own difficulties.

"He comes with me always ; I take him after I've dusted the drawing-room. He wouldn't miss it for anything, would you old boy?" she answered, smarming the animal.

"And neither would his mistress," thought Leah, acidly.

"Let's both go."

Leah excused herself, awkwardly. They never did. She was not quite reduced to that yet! Dodging the family, she stole again to the bedroom. No luck! May was still splashing and thumping about. Offer to help her? No. That might establish a precedent, and snare her gradually into becoming a "home-bird."

Jauntily she presented herself before Mrs. Bounce, and offered to do the errands. In any

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case, the street seemed the obvious place for the morning. Mrs. Bounce was gratefully pleased. She accepted the offer simply, in all good faith, giving Leah a basket and money and "the list." Leah impetuously whirled along the High Street. She found the errands evilly simple; she did them in less than half-an-hour. She envied those people who 'never knew what they wanted,' and dawdled, and priced, who performed a variety of surprise visits to shops not upon the programme, and so spent the whole morning in a most gratifying manner, even contriving, as a last touch of desirability, to be late for lunch. When Leah shopped, it became merely a matter of entering, paying, and hurrying home. She always took out with her just sufficient money, and had never "run up" a bill in her life. How heavenly to be dunned! Not to be able to pay! She promised herself debts, one day. She appeared to herself to be cast for the rôle of Amelia, after all. And she wanted to play Becky. . . .

She dumped the purchases in the hall, shouted that "she couldn't stop a minute," and ran out again. She lagged when out of sight. She lingered in the streets until the clock, with hands that had never seemed to move, pointed to 1.35. But she was five minutes late for lunch. Her own purchases consisted of a bag of acid-drops.

Sometimes the list of things she had never done, never been, overwhelmed Leah. She had, for instance, never been a godmother or a

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bridesmaid, had never "appeared in" or been "presented at" court, christened a ship, played Bridge, had a baby, stolen, had the measles, fainted, or chosen a frock. She had never had her boots or gloves made to order, been insulted in the street, had a scent named after her, or paid "country house visits."

Things could not go on like this !

She extracted one comfort from that Monday. Mrs. Bounce reproved her for unpunctuality, and said she must not "overdo things." She added that Leah would have "all the rest of the time" to do them in. It was a promising remark spoilt. Leah smiled wanly with the manner of an exhausted society woman. After lunch, she put on her best clothes, discarding most of her frocks and casting hat after hat from her with cumulative dislike and impatience, and went the round of her friends.

They were all out.

On Tuesday, she abandoned Monk's Green as hopeless, and went to town. She was in the grip of an adventuress mood. She had tried to dress the part. She looked like a musical-comedy Cossack. She deluged herself with scent, remains of a birthday present, painted herself with lip-salve, powdered, screwed on a pair of theatrical earrings, and looked at herself in the glass.

She created plenty of sensations in the neighbourhood on the way to the Underground, but the effect seemed to wear off nearer London.

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She had chosen a certain ornate café within a minute of Piccadilly Circus, and which had become the rendez-vous of all extremes of society. Women of the streets quietly took their tea and cakes scrawled with buttery sugar vis-à-vis with matrons from Tooting ; later, minor actresses and chorus girls would monopolize the place with their blue-chinned escorts. A domestic note was struck by family parties, parents, and tiny, bright-eyed children, perched on high chairs, amid the racket from the Hottentot Syncopated Band. . . The first impression resolved itself into scented heat, noise, and a superficial glaze of raffishness. But it suited Leah. Everyone smoked until the air was grey, a canopy undulating with the banging of the pneumatic swing-doors. The music, too, gave her a countenance, with its exciting, gappy rhythms ; she felt she could commit any foolishness were she accompanied by sufficient noise. She recognized that it was fortunate that the only melodies which penetrated Mimosa Road were the Saturday piano-organ and the weekly band that blew and groaned round the lamp-post near the gate, while the family was at supper.

Leah, wandering self-consciously among the crowded tables, moved to one, small, and unoccupied ; she was instantly conducted from it by a waiter to a larger, filled with an uninteresting family and their paraphernalia. She could have killed him. She squeezed into the empty place still crumby, and slopped. The waitresses hur-



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ried by, preferring to serve men. Her meal precariously cast before her, Leah revived. Afterwards, she blew clouds of smoke into the sensitive eyes of her family, until they rose.

She looked about her.

She seemed rather to have fallen between two stools in the matter of her costume ; no one mistook her for a lady of the pavement ; but her attentions with the carmine had precluded them from rating her as a casual suburban visitor. Nothing more promising presented itself than sundry entanglements of the eyes with foreign-looking men who, absorbed with their companions, made no attempt to join her at her table. Glancing furtively about, she fell to envying the pavement women. They knew their ground, and, the basic fact of their position thoroughly understood on either side, could afford to shelve it, and devote the rest of the time to a more educative companionship with men than was remotely possible to Leah and her like. It was a pity you had to become a social outcast before you could arrive at the semblance of real emancipation ! The medicine once swallowed, remained freedom, physical freedom, not the vague ideal held up by orators. "What——*larks* they must have." She did not realise that she had spoken aloud.

The key of the street. . . .

Liberty without any nonsense. With the Bounce girls, and the many thousands of families of which they were typical, a man was an event.

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They were forced to consider him, willy nilly, as a possible husband. Perhaps they skated over surfaces together—played at emancipation—but it was a farce, ending, if they were lucky, in an assured future of a flatness at once responsible and unstimulating. . . .

Saddened, Leah rose. She glanced round finally in search of adventure.

She travelled back to Monk's Green with the vicar. At the end of that week, Leah dedicated Sunday to frivolity, and went to Anne's, to gather news and complain unashamed. At Anne's there was no stigma, rather a common interest attaching to failure, in all its branches. Besides, if everything else failed, Anne could always make you shriek with laughter.

It was in such a mood as Leah's that the majority of her friends visited Anne. Leah wondered what *monde* would predominate; she hoped that it would prove, in the main, to be theatrical.

It was.

Daphne Rorley was there, a fair girl with a pathetic face that belied her pushful nature—which however availed her little, in her profession—and patient brown eyes. Anne called her "Rorthne." Stella Beresford was an unknown dancer who was gradually giving it up, and losing the world an artist; she was a fellow student of Adela Heathcote's at the Gower Dramatic School. A massive woman completed the party. She played comedy leads; her name was Honor Meredith. She was concluding an

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anecdote amid shouts of laughter as Leah slid in and subsided with a tired grin.

"And I went to the agent's about the dowager part at the St. Luke's, and he looked at me and said: 'No use to us, I'm afraid. You see dear, you're not what I call a comic fat.'"

Anne was actually in a job; she had been rehearsing while Leah was at the Varsity. Her friends expressed themselves as 'frightfully bucked.'

"Oh Anne," Miss Rorley suddenly wailed, "the Old Buffer won't have me in his new show! There goes my one good introduction!"

"Damn him."

"Who did he keep on?" A cigar had made Miss Beresford a trifle husky.

"Dora Vardon, and of course the old lot who'll only walk-on if they live to a hundred."

"I don't wonder they kept Dora," said Anne, who was making herself a winter toque out of the jigsaw pieces of an old muff, with Parisian cunning. "She's just the sort they love—fat and wenchish. I'm glad she's got her foot in there. She's had rotten luck till now."

"Did you try for it?"

"Oh yes, I went down. Harbin sent for me. I must say he's been pretty decent and always tries to get me back. I wore that green frock—the Old Devil loves bright colours. I saw he didn't recognize me, and he was on the point of taking me, when his rotten old memory

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gave a lurch and he remembered who I was, and that he didn't like me."

Stella giggled.

"Oh, Anne, *do* you remember when I turned up at the Corinth at 11 in the morning in fancy-dress to dance at that audition?" Anne nodded. "One never gets anything through those damned voice-trials."

"The pianist assed up the music, and I forgot the steps, and oh it was *awful*!"

"Poor child! Have a cigarette."

"What happened about the Corinth?"

"No go," answered Stella. "I faded away, ate an enormous lunch, and received sympathy from the family. It's at times like this that one appreciates one's home."

"I can't think what you three want to go on doing this kind of thing for." Anne's brother was supine on the sofa with a pipe. His name was Chetwyn; they all called him "Tomes" because he was engaged in a publishing firm.

No one answered him; they had all heard what he had to say before. He loved a lazy, smoke-puffing argument, and would nail ten colours to ten masts in the space of as many minutes. When howled down, he would grin sleepily.

"I met poor little Sylvia the other day," chuckled Anne. "She went to see Dudley Gags, and he instantly asked her to go for a week-end to Eastbourne. She told him for a thin man he

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had got a lot of side, and hit him over the head with her umbrella."

"Why do they *do* it?" said Mrs. Meredith, plaintively. "You'd think they'd be so dog-sick of women they'd be only too thankful to get away from 'em."

"What *does* one do when chased round the table?" enquired Miss Rorley. "You can't say 'sir-unhand-me-I-have-a-brother,' etc. : what *is* the answer?"

"A lemon." Anne sneezed.

"Look at that little *ass* Dorothy Dobell, she's been at the Tiara three solid years. Why she's *awful*! She can't walk across the stage!" shrieked Anne.

"How did she get it?"

"Paid. Her father's got pots. The Old Buffer daren't sack her; Daddy D's got shares in the syndicate."

"I'd rather chuck it than pay for a part." Daphne Rorley lived at home, and dressed on thirty pounds a year.

"My dear Daphne," from the sofa, "you've got to fight 'em with their own weapons. Pay large sums! Be a wrong 'un! Be Somebody's daughter! They'd shove you in then if you had one eye and a hump."

"I've got the hump all right," said Miss Rorley.

"My advice to you girls is, marry a fat Jew agent, and now there's tea, and forget the subject DO." He heaved himself off the sofa.

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## XVIII

WHEN Leah had been home ten days, and the old conditions had closed upon her, she received a wire from Bobby Dainton :

*Can you meet me one o'clock piccadilly  
tube lunch out bobby*

She despatched an affirmative to the Varsity. She arrived at the tryst ten minutes before the time. He was enchanted to see her, and they pushed their way to La Petite Ecossaise, throwing scrappy news and enquiries at each other. They secured a remote corner, and he gave Leah the *ménu*.

"Couldn't come sooner. Marcus kept us at it till nearly one. I was getting frantic. I say love, you're looking rather done up."

"Meaning, of course, I look a ghoul."

"You look charming, it's that filthy knocking about in the chorus. I wish I knew someone——to think of you——"

"Oh well, I'm home now."

"Yes, I'm sure you are wise."

"How's Adela?" asked Leah restively.

"Adela? M'm. Heathcote? Oh, I've hardly spoken to her since you went. There was only one girl in the show for *me*, and she left."

"Any more changes?"

"New dancer, pretty rotten, oh yes! and we've got a new number."



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“Any good?”

“I can hardly judge. The Shayle is my partner, and I spend most of my time repulsing her advances.” They laughed intimately. “By the way,” his eyes were twinkling, “I met my mother in Regent Street yesterday, and she asked me what I was doing now. I told her I had gone back to the ‘varsity!”

“Oh Bob! I rather love you!” Then he began to rummage his pockets. “By the way, Leah, I had rather a notion the other day. Why shouldn’t we do a double turn on the halls?”

“Oh my *dear* soul——!”

“You can sing and I can hop about; look here”——he produced a crumpled sheet of paper. “I sketched out an act at rehearsal one morning. We *must* work together. I simply can’t stick the Varsity, now you aren’t there.”

“But Bobby, we couldn’t tour together, even if we got booked,” she objected, ingenuously. “And anyway, how’d we get started?”

The Babes in the Wood looked at each other.

“I d’no.” said the Boy Babe.

“I’ll ask Anne, she always knows everything,” promised Leah.

The result was discouraging. Anne Sleath adduced the inside knowledge of friends who had ‘been there’ before. It seemed that in eight cases out of ten, getting an act booked involved the purchase of costumes, wigs, and possibly properties; the hire of scenery or curtains, tips to carpenters, the procuring of Band parts. The

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reward usually being criticism from some second-rate agent sitting smoking in a stall—if he came at all—or the alternative of the act being given free for the week on the chance it may ‘go down.’ “Of course,” said Anne, “some out-lying halls make a speciality of introducing new turns, but they naturally cater for a pretty low public which doesn’t understand a show of any artistic merit unless it has made good in the West-End first. But you, poor children, would come on labelled guilty until you were proved to be innocent, in a manner o’ speaking. They wouldn’t give you any quarter—except a bad quarter of an hour, and would rejoice aloud at any hitch.”

Shortly afterwards, “*Lights Up*” finished at the Varsity, and Bobby Dainton, unwillingly, joined the tour.

## BOOK III

# INTERVAL

## I

It was while the militant suffrage movement was at its height, and Clement's Inn a hive that despatched bees to all parts of the country to sting wincing politicians, that Leah Lawrence and the Bounces were accounted ready to be launched upon such society as Monk's Green offered. So they went to local dances, when quiet whitefaced women met in Intercession before carrying out a raid on Parliament Square, and crossed themselves, not knowing what of horror the end of the day might hold.

The movement affected the Bounces variously. Alice marched in the Teacher's section in processions, but declined—having an eye to her employment—to commit herself further. Bessie was strictly 'constitutional,' and made strange and hideous 'art' bags of purple suède in the privacy of her home to be sold for the cause. Ella, touring, kept her opinions to herself.

It was left to Leah to take it hard, to offer

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strength and emotions to the business. She secretly prided herself upon her passionate adherence, until a terrible thing happened.

Alice went to Holloway ; in a real van.

Shaken out of herself for the first time at some unusually brutal demonstration, seeing some girl she knew personally dragged on her back over benches and thrown savagely downstairs at some meeting she had been sent to interrupt, Alice had cut a music-lesson to hurl a brick through a West-End draper's window. She was now parading round the prison-yard and wondering timidly what the family would say.

Upstairs in the bed-room, Leah sat on the sofa staring vacantly before her. Alice, of all people ! What right had she to push in ? Who could have foreseen that a Bounce would snatch advancement from such a source ?

Leah lost no opportunity of informing her partners at dances that 'she never meant to marry.' She scared away one young man who, with but a little of the usual indecent manœuvring, would have offered himself, and bored or amused all the rest who had no intention of proposing. It displeased Leah to hear other girls elaborately announce a similar intention ; it not only, she felt, spoilt her market, but was, in addition, a brazen means of saving their faces in the event of their never getting an 'offer.'

Leah's attitude was strengthened by the spectacle of Bessie displaying her fatty charms, anxious to please, clumsily seeking to wrest a

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home of her own from condescending youth clustering round the doors and eyeing the modern slave-market before choosing. And knowing no fear of refusal. And Bessie was a bad saleswoman. . . .

Had Leah cared to, she could have achieved an unsensational success at any dance. But some devil was always in possession, and only the husk of her sat there.

Men became, on a sudden, hateful, monstrous. And the ball-room ! Her social sense, clawing at her elbow, warned her that she was not bearing neglect successfully. It was the playground—life-size ; only in the playground there was always the nonentity who could be hired with smiles to act as buffer to defeats. Sometimes the barely concealed unwillingnesses of certain of her partners caused Leah a sour amusement. She was obviously a freak. Well, better that than nothing ! Cynthia Dart, and her like, represented the apex of the social triangle ; the base was composed of those who were neither beauties nor failures, but the suburban backbone. Alice, for instance, would never be successful, but, on the other hand, she had plenty of partners. Yet Alice would never know—or miss—the stray kisses in the palmleaved alcoves. Ella in time would get plenty, but not an accompanying proposal ; men were not the fools they used to be over a golden head ! Once, Leah would have accepted the kiss, and refused the proposal, now, she would refuse both—and miss neither.

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Alice had once tried to bring up her own partners to Leah, and Leah was not grateful at the moment, or afterwards. "But I'd like you to have some nice men friends," Alice had hesitatingly apologized. "My dear, *does* one?" Leah rapped out, "By the time a man cares enough about you to want to be your 'friend,' you may be jolly sure he's fallen in love, and is trying to lead up. There are too many of us in the world for a man to need to have women friends. If he wants a 'pal,' he mixes with his fellows. He only comes to us in the last sentimental resort."

And Alice could not refute her; could not point to family examples of platonic success. She only sadly sensed that there was something wrong, somewhere; medium between the pathos of Bessie's efforts to wedge herself into the marriage-market, and Leah's crude wrenchings away from it. And a single name might save Leah from belief in her dangerous attitude. Alice saw that Leah's views were in a molten state, and was anxious they should not crystallise.

"But you like Dicky Thurloe, and Angus Macmahon?" she protested. "Of course I do," Leah assented promptly. The bumping impacts of their exchange of ideas at the meetings of the Literary Circle had comfortably scraped away all sentiment, save for the occasional stifflingly feminine intrusions of Cynthia and Bessie into the discussion.



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Well, even the suffrage movement was closed to her now ; that chance of achievement ruled off the list. Leah could not "copy." She bore Alice singularly little ill-will for her unconscious share in this move. Alice, Leah guessed, was constitutionally unable to follow up a success. The prison episode would lead to nothing. Alice always comfortably forgot, and could be generally imposed upon.

Leah gave up active participation in the suffrage campaign ; she believed in it too much, in herself too little, apart from the Alice affair. . . .

In the reaction of thought, she determined to pick up social threads. She would see what it felt like to relax. It might be rather fun. It would certainly be restful.

Mrs. Craven was giving a dance at her large house in Basil Road. When the invitations came, Leah found that she had not been included. Mrs. Craven had heard her baldly expressed opinions at other dances, and welcomed the absence of one more girl to partner.

So Bessie went alone, in bursting pink.

But there soon came another opportunity. The Dramatic Society gave a dance, and Leah went. Here she found that the garment of her suffrage incarnation still hung upon her in their eyes, and the jibbing youths giving dances at the representations of the stewards, found plenty of opportunities of escape from the strong-minded young person. So Leah sat out dance

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after dance, while amenable and deferent feather-brains gyrated their full programme to a finish.

### II

MRS. CLIFTON was the nearest approach to a "greatest friend" that Mrs. Bounce possessed. They had known each other almost from girlhood. Mrs. Clifton was subjected, in her intercourse with the other, to precisely the same policy of curious, unsocial superficialities that were accorded the merest acquaintance. Invitations somehow always came from Margaret Clifton, and her rare presence in the Bounce's house was attended with all formality. Mrs. Bounce did not understand the art of enjoying her friends; and yet she was devoted to Mrs. Clifton, in an abstract way. Leah, at leisure now to dissect others, thought it extraordinary of Mrs. Bounce. About four times in the past three years, she herself had actually glimpsed Mrs. Clifton. Now she came into focus one afternoon at tea. She was on the lenient side of middle age, with dark hair successfully undergoing the greying period. Her smile was charming and exhausted. Leah was glad to see that she had ideas about dress, even though the design was falteringly executed, and in timid materials that seemed to have lost the courage of their convictions at the last moment. Mrs. Clifton's conversation was not witty, but Leah, remem-

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bering to whom it was directed, made allowances. One never knew. . . . Long before she left, Leah had decided that Mrs. Clifton was wasted upon the Bounces. In order to ascertain if this was indeed so, she would have to organize one more meeting, and quickly. She did not intend that the visitor should vanish for another seven months or so. It was tiresome that the next visit must again be under the auspices of Mrs. Bounce ; but Leah conceded her her own drawing-room—for the present. The Bounce element made for preliminary confusion, but once past this reef Leah would steer in her own waters. She asked immediately that Mrs. Clifton should be invited again, and was prepared for Mrs. Bounce to laugh ; but she gladly consented. She seemed struck with the idea that her friend should come to her house twice in a fortnight.

This time Leah came out into the centre, rejoicing that Mrs. Clifton had passed the test. Outflanking Mrs. Bounce, she conducted her to the door.

Mrs. Clifton lived in a small house in Annesley Road. Leah succumbed to misgivings when she saw the windows hung with bead curtains.

The afternoon was a success ; Mrs. Clifton was lonely, and this girl re-created for her the atmosphere of protective affection in which she was happiest.

Leah was to take her to a theatre at the end of the week. Margaret chose and re-chose

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from the paper with childish excitement, which tenderly amused Leah. Returning to Mimosa Road from her first visit, she was well pleased. Mrs. Clifton, or Pusscat, as Leah had named her to her face before tea was cleared, accepted the situation very satisfactorily.

Leah was managing her allowance very badly. Her system of disbursements was as bad as Bessie's, although the results were more pleasing. Leah was now in receipt of £65 a year, but this was to include "everything." Bessie had made a minor scene when this intelligence percolated to her brain. Mr. Bounce gave her an additional five pounds to keep her quiet, but she often borrowed from Leah, who in the beginning was willing enough. Now, on principle, and of necessity, she refused, which did not make for harmony. Arriving, as her allowance did, bi-annually, it was a temptation to overdraw after arid months of scrimping and waiting on the next draft. Luckily holidays only occurred once a year, and the fare was reasonable. Clothes were the difficulty; there was an increasing number of figures in Leah's life to dress to. She lacked the patience to make her own hats, blouses, and underwear as Alice did; Leah's effects had to be made at once, for many reasons. Ella was more easy to suit than Leah, whose daring colouring looked merely ridiculous in tulle and ingénue chin-straps. Ella, too, had regarded Leah as her banker before she left home, but she seldom ventured to bor-

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row gold ; small change covered sweets and ices.

Now there were presents to be made to Puss-cat, theatres, chocolates, flowers, and concerts which Leah hated. She had taught her to smoke, had given her a gun-metal case with her initials in silver in the corner, and saved on a pair of outdoor shoes which let in the water the third time she wore them. Margaret Clifton was a willing pupil, she acquiesced in all Leah's manoeuvres. Gradually the Bounce element was eliminated.

Impelled by a sense of fitness, Mrs. Clifton paid more frequent visits to Mimosa Road, always informing Leah beforehand. It often happened that Mrs. Bounce was out. Bessie was generally in, waiting for her tea, and Leah, indicating her away from the teapot, took command, while Bessie had to hand cakes. In revenge, she refused to budge after the meal. Leah was unruffled, the situation amused her too much, and besides, Pusscat was always at hand when wanted. Too much so. . . .

### III

ELLA returned from her tour depressed and peevish ; she spent the mornings at the agents, and filled the afternoons with shop-gazing, or mooning in her bed-room. The vague question of classes was not mentioned, for she had now definitely thrown in her lot with the rest of the

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'hundreds and thousands,' and yearned for the exciting nights and the demoralizing days of loafing of the past months.

More than her share of the bed-room became strikingly disfigured with theatrical post-cards which were tacked or propped up and left to slide behind furniture. The servant refused to dust them and complained bitterly to Mrs. Bounce, who reasoned with Ella. Her daughter asked what maids were for, and the photographs remained, filmed and curling at the corners. Leah took up the contest, disgusted at the slut-tish muddle, and siding with Mrs. Bounce, but Ella in her raw uppishness was a far more difficult piece to move in the domestic game than either of the elder girls. Leah found herself wrangling. . . . This last phase of Ella's filled her with an intolerable sense of retrogression, it stifled her to participate in stale enthusiasms. There was very little hairbrushing confidence between them; they fought as bitterly as an unhappily married couple when the door shut them in for the night.

Lying in bed Leah planned a strategic shuffle of the household. She herself could sleep with Alice or Bessie—but then they shared a room too. Besides, they might have the sense to jib at sharing with Ella; she was the youngest. The attic that Jimmy roughed it in was out of the question, being kept for his week-ends. Leah, in extremity, even considered asking for its use for the rest of the week; she thought she could put up with



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Ella for the Saturday to Monday. But that would involve a mild form of "living in her trunk," and shifting piles of clothes upstairs and down.

There was one chance left, the spare-room, accessible at all times of the year. But it would mean that—should it fall to her lot—she would have to "do" it herself; the servant certainly would not. Leah didn't quite "see" becoming a servant, while Ella had her own pigstye done for her. Lying sleepless, she planned and weighed until her head felt numbed; she could never sleep after a quarrel. She would lie, her working brain maddening her, her forehead hot, hands and feet ice-cold, shivering with anger, and muttering beneath the sheets. At the finish of one clash of wills, her plans half-complete, she threw aside diplomacy and told Ella she was going to ask Mrs. Bounce for the spare-room.

Ella was taken aback; she wanted time to think out her own attitude. Changes like this were cataclysmic. But there was Leah facing her, a yellow-headed menace. . . .

"I think I ought to have it if mother lets us each have a room. I don't see what you want to upset her at all for. I hate sharing too."

"Well take it, take it, only make your mind up one way or the other. I can't stand this any longer."

The idea excited Ella. She longed to work for her own hand without appearing in league with Leah against Mrs. Bounce.

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“Well,”—Leah put down her comb—“who’s going to ask her? I don’t care who does it, so long as it gets done.” She had driven Ella into a corner.

“Oh, you I think. It was all your idea. Don’t drag *me* into it.”

Ella was a domestic deadhead. Leah told herself Ella “went in on her hair.” She knew she was her mother’s favourite. Ella knew that Leah would not take mean advantages. That was the only comfort. . . .

Leah got the spare-room, and the drudgery that would go with it, after a debate with the slightly scandalised Mrs. Bounce. It was a better room, and Ella was ‘on’ to that point at once, but Leah used the argument of the house-work in connection with it as a whip to lash her with, and Ella gave it up without another word. She wasn’t going to “mess about like a skivvy.” It came as a pleasant surprise to her that Leah would have to turn to.

That night, in the vast double bed, Leah lay at peace. She was exhausted.

A month later, Alice came out of gaol, and, after a breakfast of honour with her fellow felons, which she was unable to touch, was sent home in a cab. Her teaching work had been indulgently kept open for her ; meanwhile she was too ill to attempt it.

Leah tried to be kind to Alice, but the words stuck in her throat.

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"The doctor says I must feed up," she said with complacency.

"I was fed up long ago," answered Leah coldly, and resigned herself to sundry staggerings up and down stairs with trays, and to a period of sweeping and dusting.

"Feel better to-day?" she would ask, meaning "get up and get a move on, damn you!" "Yes thanks dear," weakly from the bed. Leah thought out remarks that should not reveal the state of her own nerves.

Leah took to rising early, and long walks before breakfast. She had no 'health' theories, they were too much trouble; she merely sought relief in playing harmless tricks with routine. She wrenched herself from sleep to skim about Monk's Green. The keen air seemed to strangle her, she liked her day well aired before she emerged. She had believed that these excursions into the silent, unused morning would give her fresh aspects, powers, but they only depressed her, sent her back to Mimosa Road, hollow, shivering, and unable to eat her breakfast. They lengthened the day incredibly. She tried cold baths; they were the conventional and intensely respectable panacea for all disorders. They made her heart thump and the room go black; she would be chilled to the bone for hours afterwards; her fingers turned white and 'died.'

Suddenly, Bessie smugly announced her engagement to a member of the Dramatic Society.

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Eustace Burrowes had been cast for a scene with her in some former production. It was of course left to Bessie to fan the dying embers at the dance.

Mr. and Mrs. Bounce accepted the news without excitement; they only wondered such announcements had not been made before. With three daughters it was not too much to expect. Leah, amused, prepared to study the couple. Alice was more pleased than anyone, certainly more demonstrative of satisfaction than the bride-elect. Alice experienced moments of uneasy perception in which it seemed to her that the family was not making a very good show. She looked upon Bessie's engagement as their justification. Such things were not for her. The best of her hours were occupied in a world of women, where the male element was non-existent; the 'waste pieces' of the day received her tired, and unattuned to conquest. . . .

Ella's sensations were those of mirth and outrage. The first wedding should have been her own, if looks still counted, and, failing that, Alice's. Alice was not actually plain. Jimmy didn't count. Ella took the line, in public, of its 'being the best thing that could have happened,' for Bessie. "We're all so *pleased* about it——!" Her audience quite appreciated the innuendo.

Eustace would come to supper on Sundays and 'tasty dishes' and wine replaced

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the cold remnants and brutally British salad usually accounted enough. 'Company' to any meal, if it only involved the laying of one extra place, was always an occasion of restless unease. Informality was only a name to Mrs. Bounce, and the house would hum, and preparations be on foot, from the moment she went into the kitchen after breakfast, to the time when, perspiring slightly, she fastened her creaking silk. Even then she could not let the table alone, and the dining-room was perpetually liable to suffer rushing visits and aimless last tweaks. This was an opportunity of grievance to Ella. "One can't ask people in casually, it puts mother out so." She succeeded in imbuing her sisters with this view, and even Alice began to complain. Alice and Bessie, led by Ella, found it wonderfully interesting to voice daring desires in each other's rooms. Once the idea had gripped them, they exhumed ancient wrongs. Alice contributed the yearning for a private sitting-room where, unmolested, they could receive their own friends. "This is a filthy hole! Whenever I do ask anyone in, there we all are bunched round in the drawing-room."

"It's jolly good of them to come at all."

"You can't really *talk*——."

"And mother makes such a business of it. My friends'd be much happier with a bag of buns on my bed."

"And I can't afford to take them out to tea *all* the time——."

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Eustace Burrowes was clerk to a firm of stock-brokers ; but he had sufficient prospects to render him a catch.

Ella, looking very pretty, entered the room, and, seeing the young man, flashed him a professional smile, to keep her hand in. When supper was over, the family and Eustace herded out to the drawing-room. Bessie, though obviously anxious, was ready for sentiment, and made sundry tentative movements in the direction of the garden. Leah watched, fascinated. Bessie in the rôle of chosen female was a preposterous sight ; her amateurish efforts to segregate Eustace were both pathetic and indecent. She typified to Leah the whole suburban social system. She was at any man's mercy, and armed at no single point. Even Ella would have managed better ; her methods might lack delicacy, but she would keep what she had won. There was nothing tentative about *her*. Mrs. Bounce, the worst of the evening over, suggested a "little music," and Eustace, recollecting Bessie, invited her to play. "Alice's our musician," rumbled Mr. Bounce.

When Alice had finished, Mr. Burrowes, remembering his mother's tea-parties, said "Oh yes," in dreamy gratification, and, "what *was* that?" Mrs. Burrowes always said one of these things, and sometimes both.

"Give us 'The Bird on Nelly's Hat,' Ella," Mr. Bounce chuckled, "She's a naughty little girl, Burrowes, aren't you Baby?" Eustace,



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shedding shyness, leant on the piano and punctuated the song with laughs. Bessie, propped on her chair, smiled very ably through it all. She always found her face gave her trouble when her sisters were acclaimed for their parlour-tricks. She knew just enough not to sulk. Ella's song broke any ice remaining. She and Burrowes discovered they both "loved" the same comedians, and, in a crescendo of laughter, they gave imitations, each pulling the other up for unremembered points. "No donkey! he always whistles that through his teeth!" "Yes my love, but I can't do it, so what happens?" Exhausted with giggles, they gulped lemonade. . . .

When Eustace had been "lighted down" the path and disappeared up the road, the storm broke.

Bessie was in tears, while her father, shocked, retreated to his study at the back of the house. Mrs. Bounce, slightly dazed, attempted comfort, and Leah, pitiful, amused, and exasperated by turns, hovered near the door. Ella was enjoying herself, the momentum of success was still sweeping her along.

"My dear girl I only *smiled* at him! You didn't want me to make a face did you?"

"Oh *don't* be a fool," snuffled Bessie savagely.

It appeared that Ella always got everything; it was always the same, it always would be the same; that she, Bessie, wouldn't have him at a

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gift now and that Ella had better take him as she seemed to want him, and so on, until Bessie, bulbous and unappetizing, hobbled off to bed.

Leah, Mrs. Bounce, and Ella, were left like actors waiting a cue. At length their eyes met.

“My gum!” said Leah.

“Isn’t she *awful*?” responded Ella.

“She’ll be all right to-morrow, you’d better go to bed dears.” Mrs. Bounce sighed as she twitched the room to rights, and shut the lid of the piano.

During the next few days Bessie was forbidding, ate her food morosely, and occupied her time in unguessed ways. A lumberingly tactful father waited for his hareem to subside, thankful for the sheltering arms of the Marylebone Road. Ella, in the last stages of idle misery, was strong in consciousness of virtue. Leah, in the general upheaval, felt singularly well-dressed and bright.

Meal-times these days possessed a nightmare quality what time the yapping gong summoned a troop of females to escape from their own limitations and broodings. Leah, looking for trouble, magnified their table-manners into crimes against civilisation, and would sit trying not to weep with nerves when Mrs. Bounce crashed toast with her “*Crrrump*!! wark wark wark,” or Bessie, stupidly unconscious of offence, smacked her lips. Her bovine placidity infuriated Leah; as she crumbled her bread she made up a song in her head:

## INTERVAL

*"There sits fat Bessie*

*"Punc-tually eating."*

which set itself to a maddening little polka-mazurka tune. The girls, at these periods of suspended activity, loyally refrained from questioning each other as to their plans for the day, anxious to evade the "oh nothing particular" which would accentuate an intolerable condition of affairs. The meal over, Leah pictured them. . . . Bessie glooming out of the window, emptying drawers for diversion, and waiting for the release of tea ; Ella lying down with a book and a bag of sweets, Leah herself prowling the house, and driven into the streets at last.

Alice had done the best for herself, for she was legitimately out all day, and Ella, at precarious intervals, was also from home. Mrs. Bounce hardly counted in the rush for success. No one expected anything from *her*. She had done her duty to the State, and there was an end of the matter. Even Bessie, to the public, had a small but definite place as "home-bird."

But the troubles of the Bounces in their chequered advances upon the road to matrimony seemed apart from her own affairs. She could visualise no goal but her fetish of achievement. Some achievement.

What in God's name *did* she want?

She had often wondered if it would be possible to cut loose and start afresh away from the Bounces ; had been passionately sure it was the only solution, when emerging from an engage-

## FALSE GODDESSES

ment with some member of the family. She would at least have done something ; she would have 'run away from home.' But of course that was rather *vieux jeu*. Millions of business girls lived alone ; even the "bachelor girl" was out-of-date.

### IV

ALICE obtained occasional engagements to accompany at local concerts. Her friends were always glad to "help her to" stray guineas. Through the Academy of Music she acquired a quantity of acquaintances, and several friends. At the big concert engineered by a London agent and all the influential of Monk's Green, Alice secured the post through Miss Raggett, who had a friend on the Committee. Verdune the 'cellist brought his own man. The concert was in aid of the Waifs and Strays, and Odara Tyndal was to sing.

Leah took half-guinea stalls for herself and Mrs. Clifton. Mrs. Bounce and Ella sat in the cheaper seats. Mrs. Clifton wore an evening-dress suggested and supervised by Leah, who only entrusted her with the actual sewing. The lurid spray of orchids was Leah's gift, she herself had directed its arrangement. She had no patience with women who "tucked posies at their belts." The result was a little too emphatic for Monk's Green, but effective. And then Odara Tyndal sang, and Leah, at her emerging

## INTERVAL

from the curtains, dragged her eyes even from amused criticism of Alice's dress.

The singer was a woman of middle height, of a foreign cast, which her orange-coloured sheath gown accentuated. Her rust-toned hair, brushed sheer back from her forehead, looked as though it had been chiselled out of bronze and then varnished. All her lines were clean-cut. A flat-petalled poinsettia spread carmine fingers above her ear. Her method was cool and without blandishment ; her reserve was in itself a mannerism. She sang "*Plaisir d'Amour ne dure qu'un instant.*" She was down to sing "Elsa's Prayer." She refused encores of which she might have had many. In the second half "The Psalm of Life" appeared against her name. She sang "*Il Bacio.*"

Leah, craning to see—their seats were near the exit—crushed against Mrs. Clifton, who whispered "I know her slightly." Leah did not even hear. She said good-night at the end, and went to the artist's room, Alice providing a *raison d'être*. They were having coffee ; several men waited outside. Leah smiled upon the couple. Alice took up her duties. "Leah, come and be introduced to Madame Tyndal."

"How do you do, Madame," said Leah ingenuously, "I did love your singing so, more than anything else."

Several of the artists were scattered about the room. It was in these ways Leah made enemies. Madame Tyndal bowed. She was incurious ;

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she was acclimatised to potential friendship in these green-rooms. She seldom utilized it. "You care for music, yes?" then to Alice, "my dear, fetch me another cup of coffee——."

Leah did not intend to let it go at that. Madame Tyndal had taken a fancy to Alice, or to her talents as an accompanist—Leah hoped it was that—and Alice met her intermittently to fill in when the singer's pianist was indisposed. Leah was glad that the anæmic honours were to Alice, failing herself. Alice never bothered about anyone.

Odara Tyndal rang Alice up one morning and Leah answered the call. She expressed her inability to remember Leah, and to convey a message to "Miss Bunch" through the medium of the telephone. She invited Leah to come to her flat and receive the message. "I am sure I shall remember you when I see you." She apologized for putting Leah to the trouble.

At the flat, Leah was unable to decide whether Madame Tyndal remembered her or not. She was charming, with the effect of sunshine through ice. Leah, working for a thaw, confidently expanded. Without a memorable invitation she found herself drifting along the passage to lunch.

Leah considered her own voice as a topic, but rejected it; the other might demand a sample. They began with a cunning curry,—and the Bounces. Leah managed to dispose of Alice by dessert.



## INTERVAL

“ Help yourself to walnuts, little Miss——? ”

“ Won’t you call me Leah? ”

“ I never touch them, they give me the colique.” Leah’s appetite for nuts vanished.

But in the drawing-room over coffee, Odara addressed her as ‘ Leah ’ several times, as it were inadvertently. “ It’s so—cosy in here.” Leah dragged the cretonne pouf to the singer’s feet and sat down. They smoked.

Ella said once that where Leah sat was a sure barometer of the state of her feelings. If she sat on a chair, matters were normal ; if on the arm of the visitor’s chair, it was an affair either in the first or middle stages. A place on the floor indicated a corresponding abasement of the spirit. . . .

“ Now tell me about yourself.”

Leah was not deceived. She guessed that the other, replete with lunch, hoped to open an egotistic dam that might help her to “ nod off.” A certain type of woman always asked you ‘ about yourself.’ Leah had met it before. And was it worth it? Was this going to be worth it? She always rode hell-for-leather towards her fancies. And the tide of her ordinary life would turn in time, obliterating the débris of this emotional excursionist. She recognised all ; and the pursuit of happiness went on. . . .

How callously beautiful Odara Tyndal looked ; a black impressionist figure with antique poison-ring leering on her finger, greenish lights in her hair. Leah thought she would be beau-

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tiful dead, kinder, more approachable. She was of the type that electric light must not profane, the unwavering illumination of candles in early-Italian sconces must surround her at the end. Cheerfully Leah planned her funeral. Buried at night as was the Italian custom; bannered procession winding to the mountain church; monks and acolytes chanting, torches flaring and smoking; domed flint walls, fitfully lit. . . .

Odara looked white to-day; Leah supposed she painted for the platform. Already Leah planned presents for her. To make a good show was of course out of the question, the woman obviously had everything she wanted. Leah rather believed that she herself was at the moment in low funds. Then the gifts must touch a more personal note; single flowers were expressive of devotion—with a dash of pathos.

“Come to tea on Friday in next week, it’s my At Home day, and bring Miss Bounce,” said Madame Tyndal over the telephone. Leah was engaged for that afternoon; she and Mrs. Clifton were to lunch and tea in town. She accepted the invitation, omitting Mrs. Clifton’s name.

Replacing the receiver, she considered, then rang up Margaret Clifton, who begged her to come round to tea.

She found Margaret drying her hair in the bath-room; the stifling intimacies of hot shampoo

## INTERVAL

filled the place. Pusscat looked unbecomingly tousled ; a domestic witch of Endor. Leah was not flattered. She thought : " People with grey hair oughtn't to be seen until it's done." Suddenly she disliked Mrs. Clifton. She sat upon the edge of the bath and a feeling of hopelessness overcame her. What was it the Bible said about falling into a pit that thou hast diggèd for them? And now she was like to be crushed under the momentum of this friendship. And Pusscat was waiting for the ceremonies of affection that Leah herself had taught her to expect. But Leah meant to spare her these. It seemed to her the decent thing to do. It had got to end somewhere, and soon, then why not in the reeking bathroom? And Pusscat, scurrying about, twisted her hair tightly in a towel and swooped to embrace Leah. Women over forty oughtn't to frisk ! And the fumes of pine shampoo filled the universe. . . .

At tea, they discussed woman's place in the world ; Margaret Clifton was ' sound ' upon the subject. Leah had converted her in the early stages.

" We're still only here on sufferance," said Mrs. Clifton.

At Odara's on Friday—Alice could not come—Leah met a quantity of men and women in all relations to fame, and all disconcerting. Odara sang, and it was all very tiresome.

She waited on her next invitation. It came to her as a minor revelation that Madame Tyndal

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had annexed her, in reversal of the usual order.

Odara never kissed her, but retained allegiance with mannerisms . . . nothing you could take hold of afterwards, as justification for demonstrations of devotion ; leaving you a proclaimed fool.

Leah called her ' Odara ' to the Bounces, she worked off steam that way, and in one other. In the quiet of her bedroom, working tensely at her drawing board ; some restlessness impelling her to utilisation of what Mrs. Bounce described as " quite one of her talents." That particular manifestation had not broken out in her family, or, if it had, would have appeared decorously ; another parlour-trick, not the primitive necessity ; flame burning its fiercest under the influence of a spirit's unease.

Leah's room, fought for and won, was without character ; she had accepted the hopelessness of it from the first. It bore the stamp of ' spare ' upon it still, although the austere, resigned expectancy of its former aspect was now obliterated under Leah's belongings. There were few photographs upon the mantelpiece ; the whole display only dating from a couple of years back. The chest-of-drawers held the most, stacked under blouses ; old loves, dead-as-mutton episodes. . . Ella had the brilliant show, overlapping with celebrities, whom she would never know. Leah's sparse company were at least familiars—and clean ! Of the taint of the incipient artist there was no trace, only the cupboard

## INTERVAL

held a small heap of what Leah regarded as her failures ; the good sketches had been recklessly bestowed upon their originals, purchase-money for the moment's emotional gratification. She would have liked to 'call them in' ! She seemed to herself destined to work like a beaver—for others.

This study was a caricature of Odara ; away from the singer, the creative spirit, and herself, co-operated to perceive the humour of life. Cramped, hypnotised with achievement, she bent over it ; she wondered how Odara would 'take' it ? Even a row would be better than the treadmill of the past few weeks. 'The others' had never been angry, but had surfeited with compliments, of which she was not avid when in the thick of the chase. But in the dog days, she would chew upon their tributes. She minimised them. This irrelevant gift of portraiture was clearly only another of nature's pointless tricks to complicate life. Anne admired her work, she would show it first to Anne.

The gong, cachinnating for tea, cut upon her nerves. It seemed only half-an-hour since lunch. She ate nothing ; her hands and feet were already icy. The spirit was departing from her. . . .

She remembered what had caused this afternoon of devil-driven toil ; Odara had asked her to lunch at her club and go on to her dress-maker's in Hanover Square next week, a bloodless outing. She wondered what to wear ; the

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singer's eyes were merciless, her taste sharply infallible. Leah, in her presence, felt as though the other, compressing all senses into one, became a critical and slightly malicious eye ; and yet Odara was perfectly civil. But it was the same, as far as Leah was concerned, when she had to pass the flat. It was agony to come within range of the box-like balconies. She would slink by, stiff with self-consciousness, like a thief, while the effort to propel herself to Odara's front-door exhausted her, though over-long neglect made her miserable. And now she was insolvent. Nearly everything saleable had been disposed of at loss—books, jewellery, a birthday bangle from the Bounces, a ring given by Margaret Clifton ; odds and ends ; she was stripped of all but the most fashionable necessities. She amazed Bessie, confronted by alien apparitions on the stairs ; Leah, she thought, had 'come on' incredibly. Her straining excitement, in Bessie's eyes, lent an interesting touch of brilliance. Mrs. Bounce was not so complaisant ; she thought Leah had "gone thinner," and her temper seemed to be more chancy than ever ! She also thought that Leah must have saved a lot to account for that frock and hat. How pleased her mother would be ! Mrs. Bounce generously allowed that many would consider Leah the pick of the bunch, and yet Leah and her own daughters had lined up on life's racecourse in the same uniforms, an incredibly short time ago ! Mrs. Bounce keenly de-



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sired that Leah should be photographed while this hectic, ephemeral charm was upon her, that her mother might be gladdened. Leah did not even appear to weigh the question ; she said she could not afford it.

Over Leah's sketch Anne Sleath swept an impartial but appreciative eye. The insolent colour touches gave an effect of art-concealing-art. Anne noted it chuckling. " My child, it's really devilishly good. It oughtn't to be. I don't know the woman, but I can see it's exactly her. She looks a thundering bad lot."

" I love her," said Leah. No one finessed with Anne. " You weird child, you *do* pick on such cautions !" " I know," said Leah helplessly. " You've got something—God knows what—. Why don't you go to an art school ? "

The suggestion struck the soft fatalist in Leah a blow.

" No money in it." She sheltered behind the first catchword that occurred to her. A term at an art school would open up a new era of complications. No. She wouldn't submit to becoming a ticketed unit in that smeary army of mediocrities. Anne didn't understand, she was a jovial taster of life's humours, asked nothing beyond the means to live and the popularity she always enjoyed, but she would never make her mark. Yet Leah was proud of her talent in a bewildered way, as might a man on being left a castle in the will of a distant relation. Odara

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shouldn't have the sketch anyway! This somehow salved Leah's conscience. For the future she would hoard her best, and perhaps, one day. . . . But she might beg for it? Leah steeled herself in advance.

Madame Tyndal's club was in Curzon Street. Half-Bohemian, half-smart, it harboured few dead-level types, those who sit stiff with unease, acidly glaring at an open door, or dunched over knitting, and whispering. The food—rock on which so many women's clubs split—was equal to average restaurant form. The *habituées*, sunk in divans, smoked and read. Leah stepping deliberately over the thick carpet, her eyes seeking Odara Tyndal, observed that the women, drifting in, were mostly young. The singer, by the window, was drinking a cocktail. She raised her eyebrows in recognition, and called for another.

"You're pretty comfortable here," Leah sank by her side.

"Get up! get up!" shouted Odara, "you are on my muff." She did not listen to crushed apologies as she smoothed and caressed the mass of ruched chiffon with its spray of natural lilies-of-the-valley. Leah cursed them all impartially.

"Well, how are you? I am one nerve—I *can-not* sleep in London. Waitress tell the page to call a taxi at half-past two—wait my dear, I must go to the telephone." She rose, and Leah replaced a cigarette case, lighter, chain purse, a parcel, and a bottle of aspirin.

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She laid them on the table, which held gloves, veil, umbrella, fur-and-chiffon wrap, and more parcels. Leah scanned her as she returned. Odara wore a tightly-fitting hat of blood-coloured wings; arrow-shaped wings on either side hid her ears. Her lips matched—perfectly. “A thundering bad lot; you weird child!” But Anne’s tongue spared no one.

“Tell me who’s everyone, they all look interesting—except the one by the fire-rail,” Leah indicated the room’s anomaly.

“There’s no one here to-day. This is quite a good club, as clubs go; women have yet to learn to make them habitable. Your amusing atmosphere of pugnacious emancipation prevents that at present. We have barely got beyond the stage when to possess a second home where one might forget one’s own, stamped one as faintly undesirable. I tried several before I chose this. I was—what you call?—blackballed, at one. Imagine it! I suffer among frumps, they affect me as a bad smell. We have none here, thank God, except Madame there, and she is *feministe*, so what will you?” She tilted the wings in the direction of the fire-rail and blew a fan of smoke at the unconscious back. “And now darling, we will have lunch.” . . .

Waiting for the fish course, Leah ventured that Madame Tyndal was not well perhaps? She meant “are you happy?” but the question seemed sentimental and impertinent.

“I am not very happy just now.” The singer,

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for some reason, was answering her real anxieties, her foreign accent and phrasing lent a charm to confidence, while mitigating the unreserved manner in which it was made. "I'll tell *you*, I know you will care." Leah smiled cynically. How exactly like Odara to reveal in this revoltingly unsuitable atmosphere, after endless opportunities in the past! And careful listening was the quality needed to keep this sprung leak trickling; any trifle would stop it. Neglecting course after course she devoted herself to the other who was talking with unleashed freedom. "And my dear child I am so dreadfully hard up! My flat costs,"—she named the sum—, "and I have to have dozens of evening dresses. . . ." Her private income, and what she made, she tossed to Leah as a make-weight. "And I owe my tailor a hundred. He is suing me, that will be a tiresome business. I shall have to work harder, and I hate work. In my life, one is never free to be oneself. How I am sick of it all! and darling, I am a naturally domestic woman. Hah! you don't believe me! I have had no home life. My childhood was really Hell; my mother was Spanish. Her temper was of the devil; my father is dead; killed in a duel with my mother's lover. She's still alive. She's a beast of a woman. I never go near her—I don't know why I'm telling you all this. . . ."

Inevitably men drifted in with the stream. Leah listened, flattered, worried, but pas-

## INTERVAL

sionately attentive. "He is really quite a darling and you must meet him. A man I met in Nice shot himself when I told him I was *fiancée*. There was a great to-do; I could not sing for weeks afterwards, and after all I broke off my engagement—more wine?—. Sometimes I think a home of my own and a husband is all I want."

Leah did not believe her; this was the type of emotional rounding-off to be expected from a certain kind of woman after a certain kind of confidence.

In the lounge over coffee, she showed Odara Tyndal the sketch. She looked at it dispassionately. "I have no dress of that colour," she said, "I did not know you were an artist. You have much observation. Very amusing." She had no sense of humour. Leah laid down the drawing, beaten. You could never get upsides with Odara.

Seeing the singer frequently it was forced upon Leah that the social ice was barely chipped. It wasn't a question of time or faithful service, apparently, but something temperamental, that she saw at last as the barrier.

Odara was preoccupied now, paying Leah less attention than ever. She began to go less often to the flat. She would go home depressed and miserable; would sit at Odara's table waiting, like a paid companion, for her cue.

"Miss Bounce tells me that you are great—but great—friends with Mrs. Clifton. I too

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have met her." Leah deprecated this. Madame Tyndal frowned; Alice had told her far more than that. Leah shifted uneasily, she was enraged. How could she have foreseen this?

"You are fickle, yes?" the singer comfortably analysed, "then I too shall know what to expect!" She laughed. "'*On revient—jamais—à ses premiers amours,*' hein?" Leah, at bay, muttered something about "going on to better ones."

"I should say you wasted much time over people who gave you nothing but emotional returns?"

Leah was arrested by this hazard; the damped fires struggled up eagerly, she enjoyed being warned against others by the right person. Had Odara cared to, she could have clinched allegiance there and then, but she was too much for Leah. She decided to mark off the episode as a bad debt.

And now she had voluntarily lost Mrs. Clifton.

It was from Alice that Leah learnt that Madame Tyndal was to start for Paris within the week.

## V

THE Literary Circle gave a party; one of the number had had a story accepted, and sunk the proceeds on a claret-and-sandwiches supper. Anne's drawing-room was commandeered by



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the dashing host, and Leah thankfully repaired to it ; Bessie was still occupied with her muddled love affair.

Anne Sleath was there, a guest, circumstance that appealed to the Circle, and Mrs. Cedric Vernon, whose only claim to be present lay in her popularity. The host, the lion of the party, Pansy Conran, and several old friends whose tentative contributions to the press thumped back regularly through the letter-box, completed the company and filled the confined space, when the door opened and a girl entered, unannounced and smoking.

She paused and nodded with mock condescension.

“ Good evening children, all good ? ” she asked, and smiling sat down uninvited and rested her feet in her host’s lap. She seemed to be about twenty-six ; Leah’s roving eye was instantly rivetted.

It transpired that she was Deirdre Pope ; her curious poetry was beginning to have a restricted vogue that extended beyond the confines of Monk’s Green. Anne had imported her from the All-Arts club in town.

Miss Pope had all and more of the mannerisms of the predestined celebrity ; Anne had warned her that she would find the Circle amusing, had also asked her not to laugh when anyone tried to be raffish.

Miss Pope was slim and small, and gowned in a peacock-coloured seamless djibbeh with a

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medallion of orange silk upon the breast. She had chopped her black hair short, and it stood out thickly round her head. Her face was pale, with narrow slanting eyes.

Leah judged her ultimate chances by the manner in which her first advances were received ; up to a point she was always singularly successful ; the unconscious possessor of her heart appeared to fall in with her most exacting requirements in the early stages, but she was bitter when they ignored the ideals she had presented them with. They must conform, or they must go ! She mistook this injustice for a compliment.

Miss Pope seemed half asleep, but her eyes were gleaming with sarcasm ; she spoke to no one but Anne. Cynthia whispered to Leah : “ I should think her motto was ‘ Death or *Liberty* ’ ! ”

As the party broke up, Leah lingered about Miss Pope, now talking to friends ; she took no notice of Leah, and the other accepted neglect, thought in a flash of her school days. . . . She moved to the door ; Miss Pope talked on. Leah flung her pride away and frankly waited in the hall. At length Miss Pope emerged and throwing an ecclesiastical biretta of black velvet on to her mop of hair, and enwrapping herself in a species of gabardine prepared to leave.

“ Shall we go home together ? ” asked Leah, smiling very brightly.

## INTERVAL

"M-m?" said Miss Pope trying to unfasten the front door.

"I mean—are you going my way?" floundered Leah.

"Depends which way that is." Then : "I remember you, you're the funny little girl in the green frock." In the street, Deirdre Pope was moved to behave as though she and her companion had known each other from infancy ; and Leah lost her head.

"I'm taking a flat," she announced, and astonished herself far more than the other. Then plunging : "What larks if we could live there together!"

But Miss Pope was inured to the unconventional.

"Well, why not? Let's. 'Think we should get on, eh?'" And at Leah's own turning : "Let me know what you decide to do about it. 'Bye-bye."

She fled without leaving her address.

## VI

THE idea of the flat, to which she felt in a sense committed, supported Leah over the next few days. There was now no difficulty about money ; her mother appeared to be prospering. Leah would exercise economy and deprive the Bounces of the sum she was obliged to hand them for her board. She told them all while the intention was

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upon her. Of Deirdre's compliance she entertained no doubts, for she generally managed to get what she wanted if it depended solely upon personal exertions.

Mrs. Bounce, harassed with 'the servant problem,' and worried about the moody Bessie, asked no questions, but raised plenty of difficulties, extremely practical. She insisted on flat-hunting with Leah, and prosed of rents, stairs, chars, and catering; reft herself from the household duties that so urgently demanded her presence, with a plodding desire to do her best for Leah.

She tried to be grateful to Mrs. Bounce, but it was an effort. "She makes herself such a determined, unnecessary martyr." Leah at last resigned herself to being overruled and left the whole business to her.

Her line of passive resistance enabled Leah to devote herself to finding Deirdre, which she did through the agency of Anne Sleath. Deirdre had billeted herself upon some literary friends and seemed to have no home; when her visiting-list was exhausted she lived at her club. Of her parents, if any, she never spoke.

Anne brought them together once more at her house, and went out for the afternoon leaving tea at hand.

"I say Miss Lawrence, what fun!" began Deirdre, "it'll just suit me. I never thought you meant it."

"Neither did I" shrieked Leah, "and for heaven's sake don't call me Miss Lawrence!"

## INTERVAL

At last the flat was ready, and Leah's determination was shaken.

She had been out all day on Hampstead Heath with Deirdre, who had been difficult and elusive. She had taken a volume of poetry with her and had read it aloud, explaining passages to Leah, as they lingered on the breezy heights. Later, Leah would enjoy her poses, but, in matters of the affections, her sense of humour was always in abeyance. She listened slavishly, took her cue of admiration or condemnation.

Leah found the parting from the Bounces very trying. She felt alternately, and bewilderingly, pathetic and injured. But the details of getting out of the house clubbed sentiment on the head, and damaged pleasure considerably. When the key refused to turn owing to the helpful attentions of Bessie ; when the trunk bumped down the stairs, and Mrs. Bounce gave loud warning not to scratch the wall-paper or knock the pictures crooked, Leah, in a riot of irritability, would have given up the whole thing thankfully ; she could have screamed at the fuss. But there she was ; booked for an emancipated "act" of which she was already doubting the issue. One fact stood out of chaos. The flat must be occupied, and at once. With an unwilling spirit, and mind struggling to readjust itself, she taxi'd away from the Bounces. She was even robbed of a good exit, a drive-like-hell door-slamming departure, for Mrs. Bounce was kindly and optimistic. She

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had learnt in her training as mother not to betray surprise and alarm at any vagaries on the part of her own daughters. But Leah Lawrence was a different proposition. There was an alien quality about her moods.

Thoughts crowded upon Leah as she leant back in the taxi.

After all, everyone in that house was seeking happiness in her own fashion, and the one undramatic figure—faithful Mrs. Bounce—patiently, sanely, kept it going with regular meals and general accommodating efficiency; suppressing any fledgling desires she herself might have had, that the “young things” might have their lives to squander unhampered. Wet or fine, she fought in crowded shops for food, unthanked, and alone; rewarded if, through some unforeseen hitch and consequent afternoon of leisure, one of her girls took her out on local “jaunts.”

Leah struggled with rising tears.

She let herself into the flat. Her trunk had been left downstairs in everyone's way; Leah did not mean her first moments with Deirdre to be mixed in hideous details of tipping and settling; she had been in at too many deaths of joy before! She was free; Deirdre was waiting for her. As she stood in the narrow hall she heard voices. The hall itself was not as Mrs. Bounce had left it, the pictures were now at the further end; “Hope” leant against the wall, and “Re-union” near the door, the glass



## INTERVAL

cracked. A line of Brangwyn etchings took their place. But Leah pushed forward.

She found Deirdre with friends in the partly-furnished drawing-room. They were sitting in a rough circle on the floor ; parts of an unclassified meal were spread on a red-checked tablecloth.

"Come on Fabian, pass the cup from hand to hand. It's our turn round this way and I've a thirst on me I wouldn't part with."

Deirdre wore a long overall of sultry orange linen, her hair was bound in a patterned contadina handkerchief.

They seemed to consider Leah as she came in.

"Hullo Leah ! so you've turned up—don't jiggle me Agra !—have some food. We've been working like navvies havn't we, animals ? Give her the cup, Fay. It's all right, we haven't licked it."

"Fabian" politely advanced upon Leah. "I think I will rinse it at the sink if you don't mind waiting a minute." They clapped him as he went out. He turned, thanked in mime, and staggered out poisoned.

More voices in the hall, and a girl and a boy came in, dusty and arguing. She was in a student's smock and trousers, her hair was coming down ; her companion's velvet jacket was smeared with pink paste.

"We've done the brasses," she put a bowl of brightness upon the floor and subsided. "Hullo ! garlic !! where did you raise it Pope ?"

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“Fay found it in some weary little joint in Frith Street,” said “Agra.”

“Good egg! but we shall be a pestilence for days now. I must put all thoughts of love from me—however, it’s worth it.”

The boy called Fabian came in and handed the cup to Leah.

“Someone wake Raymond up,” said Agra to the boy who had brought in the brasses, “Raymond! what a name! it sounds like an outline drawing of some forsaken pianist that they stick up in the Tube.” Raymond grunted, “Well I *am* one, so that’s all right.”

“Not you! I give the City a year to swallow you!”

Leah sat stiffly in her chair, soon she would rise and shake hands with her hostess, and thank her——

“Kind of Mrs. Bounce to help us,” said Deirdre, “I suppose all this won’t offend her?”

“Mrs. Bounce—whoever she may be—ought to be jolly glad if she knew,” said the girl in trousers, “it’s the first bit of real work you’ve ever done—altering everything——.”

“Sh-h!”

“Oh I’d love to get my teeth into these wall-papers!” Fabian nodded resigned; “Aren’t they the naughtiest things you ever struck?”

“But I suppose they’re the landlord’s choice, and I don’t want to get quodded for damaging property. What’s the law about wall-papers—if any?”

## INTERVAL

“Gawd knows.”

The trousered girl rose, and surveyed the room.

“What did it say in the lease, Deir’?”

“My dear child I never read it. It isn’t done. I signed, and Leah signed, and we all kissed in the vestry. Ahhhh!” she yawned, “the thing is—who clears up?”

“Look here. These wall-papers. I want brown paper, then when anyone amusing comes they can do sketches on it and sign them.”

“’Been done, ‘Je prong’—and all that.”

“Well, but——could you live with pineapples in a thunderstorm?”

“We’ll take the rest of the carpets up to-morrow,” announced a girl who had sat silent and cross-legged the whole time. “I won’t stand for the ones you’ve got, Pope. Their vibrations are low. On Monday we can start varnishing the boards, or we might leave them austere, that looks more studied. Fraternity’s got some set-out they call ‘Monkish’ or ‘Saxon’—I forget which—and the answer is some schoolfeast benches and trestle tables with hearts punched in them, and some pewter littered about. They’re charging enormous prices for them. I shall start a shop—Oh but *exclusive!*—in the scrag-end of Bond Street, and put one kitchen chair in the window. We’ll ticket it ‘Domestic. Mary-Anne period.’ It’ll fetch ’em in crowds.”

“I’m too dead to do another thing,” complained Fabian, adding, “let’s dance.”

## FALSE GODDESSES

“Kick the food out of the window, someone.”

What furniture there was they bunched in corners. Raymond played beautifully. “*Jardins sous la pluie*” dripped and glinted; the marble temple gleamed, embowered in glooming foliage; the bronze Pan poised, sardonic, in his beech-grove. Almost the player drew the scent of lilac from the keys. . . . They howled him down; they swayed with hypnotic languor to the yearning cadences of “Some of these Days”; they walked only on the edge of the rhythm, broke it with capricious rushes and swoops. Agra and the silent girl moved palm to palm, as one. They danced like professionals. Fabian, on whom the mantle of convention seemed to have fallen, approached Leah. His dancing was quite as bad as that of the youths of her world; his hand splayed over her shoulder-blades. They disengaged with mutual relief. Raymond attempted to leave the piano, but was pushed back. Deirdre, by comparison, was not a good dancer, Leah observed, her rhythms were less harmonious than her verse.

The dusk fell in swathes, almost visibly, layer upon layer. The girl in trousers spoke of supper. “Can’t be done. Sorry,” said Deirdre. Leah waited, at strain. Deirdre added: “I’m due at the Latimers, he’s just taken a new studio in Glebe Place. Thank God I can go as I am. Well—à demain then.” They dispersed, Deirdre in their wake. At the door she

## INTERVAL

paused and held Leah's arm retentively while she sought for what she intended to say. "Oh, I shan't be very late Leah dear, 'bout one, or a little after. I expect you'll have gone to bye-bye or—are you booked too? No? I don't want to go a bit to-night, its a terrible bore, but one must——," she raised her well-marked eyebrows, "I really must be off. Oh——good-night darling——." She kissed Leah, shook her arm smilingly and released it.

The front door slammed. . . .

## VII

LEAH's propinquity with literary life as represented by the dissective poetry in which Deirdre steeped herself, revived old ambitions. She saw herself the successful novelist, discreetly pointed out at gatherings of the Elect to adoring girls whom she would befriend, and talk to with sweet sad mystery and the cynical smile of one-whom-the-world-has-battered-but-who-has-won-through. "I don't know why I am telling you all this, but I think you will understand." . . . She saw descriptions of herself in the picture papers; cautious banter on her appearance, that would but thinly cloak the very real respect of the organ for her genius. Mr. Rattler, lightly touching upon Parliament and the latest musical-comedy, would add:

## FALSE GODDESSES

*"Among the audience I noticed Leah Lawrence who appeared to be clothed in snake-skins. Is she perhaps seeking the wisdom of the serpent for her next novel? Arresting, but,—somewhat gruesome."*

and so on.

Drugged by the atmosphere which Deirdre imported to their joint establishment, and by the long discussions of her writer friends, Leah actually achieved a complete novel. She sat and contemplated it with a deep satisfaction. It was her Life Work. But when she had become accustomed to the idea that she could and would write, she found that her spleen was exhausted. It was not the first of a brilliant series, as she yearned that it might be, it was sheer Leah, up to date. Cankered accounts of the Bounces, easily recognizable. . . She had spared neither her friends nor herself.

Anti-climax confronted her on the completion of the book. She knew no publishers or literary people save those friends who plucked the fringe of journalism. Of the necessary procedure she knew nothing; it had not even occurred to her that the surprisingly small bundle of manuscript must be type-written.

Leah one Saturday evening carried it to a meeting of the Literary Circle which, in spite of time and waning enthusiasm, as one after another was swept into the business of life, still straggled on. To the residue, Leah, dry of mouth and shaky of hand, read her manuscript; it took little over an hour. At the finish Anne, voicing



## INTERVAL

general opinion said: "Well Leah my child, you've got it off your chest at last!" Then everyone edged in shop gossip, and Leah remained to the end.

She was afraid they would discuss her, and of what they might say.

Life with Deirdre was an enslaving, saddening affair. Leah often wondered on what rock they would finally split. Little rocks offered themselves in plenty all the time, but she held on, hoping for better things, totally unable to break the spell.

*"Une qui baise, et une qui tend la joue."* . . .

Leah took Deirdre to the theatre; she would secure her for at least three hours that would not be subject to any possibility of disappointment or interruption, or to those flighty departures which made life at the flat so impossible.

Warmed with hope, she ran up the staircase with the tickets; and then a hideous possibility overwhelmed her. Deirdre would have an engagement for one of her endless studios, and would decline to shelve it; she had a talent for disappointing and putting you in the wrong at the same time. But for once no light excuse was made. Deirdre listened and said: "I was going somewhere to-morrow—can't remember where 'n anyhow it doesn't matter. I've always wanted to see that show, 'clever of you to think of getting seats. Stalls too, you bad child!"

She sent Leah running to telephone the givers

## FALSE GODDESSES

of the party. They drove to the theatre. Leah was of those who believe all sentimental difficulties can be solved in taxis.

As they sped down Kensington Gore, she felt poignantly forlorn, she even longed for her mother. It often surprised Leah how barren was her knowledge of her mother, but this ignorance could be twisted to suit her moods. All the dramas had a "mother" motif, and to get her way Leah used it intelligently. This was about the only manner in which her mother was an asset. But Leah had moments of genuine displeasure. It was outrageous to reflect that she did not know a single circumstance connected with her mother's people, of even her maiden name she was in ignorance. She pretended to remember her father; she only knew that he was dead—which was quite a respectable thing to be. On the whole, she was too indifferent to be curious, she only feared that in some way this lack of data might injure her socially, but shrank from confiding this to Mrs. Bounce; she would feel humiliated. And anyway, the whole affair was ancient history, a condition in which Leah had moved since she could remember anything. It seemed hardly decent to resurrect the very scheme of things.

Leah's interest in the performance was intermittent and subject to her companion's every movement. Suddenly a futile rage swept over her. Damn it! How kind she could be in Deirdre's place! She didn't ask much!

## INTERVAL

When the lights went up, Deirdre gave a little laugh, patted Leah's fingers, and huddled her cloak about her.

The evening was over. It was hardly worth a guinea. . . .

## VIII

FROM Deirdre Leah acquired a taste for spineless yet assertively artistic garments in curious colours, and would have succumbed, had not her pride and sense of humour withheld her. To see Deirdre's slow, sinister smile of comprehension was unthinkable. Leah was increasingly unwilling to yield up her entire personality on the altar of friendship, and she filed the question of barbaric wear for future reference.

There came to the flat at all times a man in the early thirties whose peculiar name, Wreke Munday, was in harmony with his appearance, manners, and pictures. He was a Cubist. It was impossible for the conventional eye to perceive what he and Miss Pope felt for each other.

He called once when she was out, and Leah, struggling to find a joint in his armour, gave up the attempt at last, and showed him her novel—to make him talk of some other subject. She thought it was morbid enough even for him!

"Have you shown it to Deirdre?" he asked, rejecting the manuscript.

## FALSE GODDESSES

Leah had not. Deirdre took all the enthusiasm out of her. Leah hoped she was not doing her friend an injustice, but she vividly pictured the latter's attitude as that of *The Indulgent Smile*. In the matter of her book, Leah had been driven to subterfuges. She was flippant, assuming as a shield the attitude towards herself she thought Deirdre was taking. Surprised at work, Leah had been as ashamed as one caught stealing. It was a form of self-revelation which she was unwilling to make. But her vanity prevented her from confiding this to Munday. She exonerated Deirdre from any suggestion of indifference with all the odd, passionate pride that moves the slum woman to conceal a bad choice by defending the husband who has just knocked her down from the protests of a third party.

And then one day, Deirdre left, without warning, and went to live with the artist, and Leah bitterly hoped that Munday's child would indeed be fair of face. . . .

Left alone, Leah turned to Bobby Dainton, who was touring the suburbs prior to departing to the provinces. He would be solid comfort.

He came, and was all that could have been desired; the affair appeared to be knitting itself up again quite satisfactorily.

"I think I must marry Bobby." But Leah knew she had no intention of doing so. She gave herself to excursions into those emotions which she guessed, as an average girl, she ought

## INTERVAL

to be feeling. This allowed of quarrels, reconciliations, despair (Bobby contributed this) and the usual hackneyed paraphernalia.

Soon she found that the expenses of the flat could not be borne alone. A little over a third of her income had gone to the rent ; the house-keeping had been undertaken by herself. They neither of them minded what they ate ; all Leah knew of the food question was a horror, inculcated by Mrs. Bounce, of ' things in tins.' They had no meat except when they took meals in restaurants ; Leah had no idea of how long joints should last, and she could not cook them even had she known. Eggs and bacon was their staple diet, and raw fruit. After the first week, Leah gave up trying to calculate the cost of living. They ran no bills, if one was short of money for some impending meal, it was carelessly handed over by the other.

When Leah was left to wind up affairs, fears and worries without end filled her mind. In the end she sent for Mrs. Bounce, who packed and sorted furniture, linen, pictures, and the greasy kitchen utensils. Mr. Bounce undertook the landlord. Leah was now given the option of remaining in possession for the rest of her lease—a month—but instantly declined. To go back to chaff was bad enough, to remain a thousand times worse. But an agreeable surprise awaited her. The Bounces, to a man, stood by her. Ella even made Leah laugh with her vitriolic condemnation of Deirdre Pope ;

## FALSE GODDESSES

Bessie hung about, brow furrowed, anxious to console. Mrs. Bounce came out of it best. She never mentioned the matter. . . . The dears ! They were all dears !

So Leah returned for the second time to the Bounce's roof.

### IX

THE happenings, the scraps of news that, after a prolonged period of dreary brooding, Leah emerged to assimilate, resolved themselves into the facts that Jimmy Bounce was shortly to be married to a City typist, a 'good safe girl,' and that Wee Di had been forbidden to join the "*Lights Up*" tour, and had returned to her home next door. Mrs. Bounce had a new char, and Bessie a new interest.

Ella circulated it about that her sister had "got religion." She was attached to a chapel organization in the Northbourne Park region ; it provided 'hearty' games twice a week for the offspring of the more notorious among the local drunkards, chapel teas, district visitors, Missions to Young Men, and Talks to Mothers. Bessie, unable to put her own house in order, had flung herself with uncouth zeal into performing that office for other people, whose worldly means rendered them accessible for experiment. It was a species of emergency throw-back to her



## INTERVAL

father's innate religious convictions. The leit-motif of Bessie's speech was "the minister" and "Helpful Talks."

This was Ella's priceless opportunity. Bessie, she said, was as easy to roast as a chestnut. Her sister, unreadier of retort than ever before colloquial chaff, would generally retire to howl in her bed-room; at her most amiable, Ella only ridiculed, but if Bessie went grizzling to Mrs. Bounce and Ella came in for reproof, she would become merciless. "If she was married and had a thumping great baby we shouldn't hear any more pi-jaw," Ella would contemptuously tell Alice. She repeated the remark to Leah, who perceived that there was something in it; but she snubbed Ella mechanically. Ella would be very amusing at tea-parties; clever enough to grade and select her jokes; if she went too far she might get disliked, and it wasn't worth that just for Bessie. It sometimes occurred that people whom Ella met were inclined to be interested in Bessie's "mission work," and brushing aside the young girl's racy flippancies, would ask earnest questions. This was annoying, but Ella learnt to take her cue, and composing her face was gravely kind; she knew almost nothing about the chapel work, she had only built her jibes upon Bessie's early unguarded enthusiasm. But she herself had stopped that source of amusement. Bessie, overhanded from the first, now obstinately refused to speak. She and Ella had no confidence. They avoided each other as

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much as possible when Ella was finally warned off by her mother, wearied of the undignified outcries of her elder daughter.

Ella had for Bessie an effervescent contempt ; Bessie spent her time in futile envy of Ella's talent for getting her own way. Alice, for them, did not seem to enter the arena at all, she was just easy to get on with, a useful listener-to-complaints. She was the only truly domestic of the three, but she had no time. With Bessie, it was natural inaction, and total inability to get what she wanted from life, that had earmarked her from her school days ' the stay-at-home one.'

Ella was now in the enjoyment of her own allowance ; she had hauled down the flag of independence very soon after she came home from the tour. When the last penny of her salary was gone, she soon began to clamour. Mrs. Bounce was in a quandary, she dared not give her even what Bessie drew, and the child would be a good investment. Mrs. Bounce regarded the sum allowed Bessie as money thrown away, even with care she would never " repay " dressing. She gave Ella £25 a year, so that Bessie still led by a fiver, Ella calculated. Bessie made a scene, and her father intervened for the first time and told her she ought to be ashamed of herself. " We do our best for you, and it's nothing but worry, worry, worry. What is it you want?" and his thumb and index finger hovered suggestively at his waistcoat pocket, and Bessie was astonished and

## INTERVAL

cowed. But the experiment was not a success. Ella had none of Alice's steadiness, or Bessie's bad taste in dress, neither was she the manager Leah might have been had not so many entanglements stood in the way of ordered expenditure. Ella brought all her childishness to the management of her money ; most of it appeared to "go into her stomach," her father said. She became dyspeptic and subject to heartburn, she kept big boxes of chocolates in her handkerchief drawer. She had a passion for being photographed, and red envelopes of brown proofs were a feature of her place at the breakfast table. She never seemed to have anything to wear ; assets in hand soon showed the strain.

Ella now had her hair up. That milestone of life alone had been passed by the Bounces without fuss. At the time of the innovation it had been Leah's boast that she fixed her hair with two pins, like Sarah Bernhardt. But she was in the thick of an artistic spell at the moment ; later she was sorry that she had taken that line. Alice had passed unnoticed ; her hair always looked neat and mature, from the 'doorknocker' of the High School days. Bessie's head rather suggested the contents of a baker's shop, a roll in front, a bag behind slipping away from a bun on the top, and the coiffure endured for months after the others had, what Mrs. Bounce described as "found their heads." Leah and Ella, experimenting continually, were generally pleasing to the eye.

## FALSE GODDESSES

When Ella overdid her applications to her mother, Mrs. Bounce admitted defeat, and reluctantly discontinued the allowance. It was easier to get the child clothes "as she needed them."

Upon the illness of a valued helper, Leah offered to accompany Bessie to Northbourne Park, hoping the experience might prove an anodyne to thought.

The slum district in which the chapel was situate opened up for Leah new types of emotions. Hollow-eyed houses (with the sign "good beds") approached by steep peeling steps, thronged with women dressed with a brazen unconcern for public opinion. Rows of these houses, and filthy brats tumbling and yelling in the road; a pub at the corner through whose brilliant windows at night could be seen the bar-maid polishing glasses. Shops heaped with cheap sweets, "jelly babies," "liquorice boot-laces," and to almost every street its picture-palace, with dim gilt lettering, flaring, badly-drawn posters, and cream plaster blistered or stained according to the time of year.

Leah hoped that the minister would call her "our dear sister Lawrence"; anything might happen here, if all Ella said was true! But she was disappointed. The Rev. Hiram Bodgers conformed to type only in possessing a long upper-lip and a droning voice; he did not appear again after the awkward, grateful handshake all round in the chapel recreation-room.

## INTERVAL

Leah believed the children would love her, but when they entered the gas-jetted room and saw the close-smelling youngsters, a wave of disgust broke over her. The children did not "cling to her skirts," "clamour for a story," or "set up a shout of feeble joy" as she appeared; they shouted, certainly, but always noisily, and seemed disconcertingly, almost impertinently, able to amuse themselves. Of course as time went on stray personalities extracted themselves from the rag-heap, and with some of these Leah, trying to feel of use, and sometimes really interested as well, initiated advances, but they sensed her shyness, and would edge away. The regular helpers, professionally efficient, were more successful, with their absence of any desire to attract love, and the children responded to their marshalling of the play where Leah with her timid coaxings failed. Endeavouring to imitate these standard methods, Leah would spasmodically assume airs of authority; but her efforts were unconvincing, and upon the return of the now convalescent helper, she gave up accompanying Bessie on her rounds.

Life for Leah dragged on its way with nothing to show to the world without for all the mental activity within. Her mind covered inconceivably vast tracts of ground that the weary body could not keep pace with. Being asked "what she was doing now" stifled her. It wasn't fair. She wondered if she even had a right to life? The world would probably say yes, but she



## FALSE GODDESSES

would have remorselessly ordered her own extermination, together with any others of her kidney. The world must not be cumbered ! The survival of the fittest was not a question of mere brawn. Those who failed to make good must go ; extenuating circumstances were beside the point.

The least of her woes was a good honest boredom, and she thought a flirtation might be what she was looking for.

But after all, what was love to her ? She had not got beyond the idea of kisses, knew herself incapable of that selfless devotion which it appeared was the "only wear" for the noblest women.

One year, on the annual trek to Shanklyn, she had pushed herself into love with a middle-aged friend of Mr. Bounce—Leah affected age—and for a time matters were nebulous and pleasant, until the morning when the family and The Affair toiled, grilling, over the sands beyond the pierrots to a shady place where a picnic lunch, garnished with sandhoppers, was served. When they had buried the paper bags, Mr. Ellis announced that he was going to paddle—that alone would have damned him—but under Miss Lawrence's loathing gaze he removed shoes and socks, and rolling up his trousers, lurched mincing down the shingles, revealing hairy shanks and yellow heels. Some women might have survived the spectacle. Leah didn't.

And now, the winter was almost upon them all, a time dreaded increasingly by Leah. She



## INTERVAL

had weighed up the year and found the winter the worst. It brought the family closely together—physically. There was, inevitably, a herding in the drawing-room, stifling contacts round the fire, your arms pinned to your sides to avoid knocking someone. A gap in the massed semi-circle only meant annoyance going on elsewhere, for, even now, Alice kept herself efficient as a soloist at the piano. Leah never suspected—they none of them did—that the critical publicity, so much more personal than a real audience, was as trying to the performer. But it was then or never. Sunday was almost impossible ; if Alice rose early the fire was unlit, there was church eating the best part of the time before lunch, and the family, and callers, in possession until supper. And Mr. Bounce, with his crackling newspaper that kept up a perpetual roaring of fidgeted sheets. Otherwise he was inoffensive ; he preferred his study, in the long run, a pipe was forbidden in the drawing-room. Cigarettes had been reproached with elaborate openings of the door, and “standings ajar” of the French window, until Leah had turned smoker, and Ella in her wake. Her own sex against her, Mrs. Bounce had been obliged to capitulate.

One night, unable to bear the house, Leah leapt on to a bus and went to town, to the Corinth.

She saw Jay Lewes for the first time.

## FALSE GODDESSES

### X

FROM Manchester came a pæan from Bobby Dainton. His father had "promised him a swingeing allowance, if he, on his side, would cut out the stage business. And might he come and see Leah on a very urgent matter?"

Leah supposed that the episodes at the flat had encouraged him; his hopes, she thought, possessed the mechanical vitality of the earth-worm, even when severed by the unheeding spade. She owed him a lot—more than he realised. He had saved her face for her intermittently ever since the Varsity days. Collapse at Deirdre's beastliness had been the means of bringing Bobby to her feet! She wondered if he had suspected this at the time; but men were very dense, thank goodness. And Leah valued Bobby; he was beyond price, and of course he would get over his unreasoning infatuation in time. Leah ran over her list of acquaintances; she would like to see Bobby happy and settled with some good sort who would adore him. He would probably like her if Leah said she did. . . .

When casually informed of the prospective visit, Mrs. Bounce became tryingly playful, bringing what Ella called her "marble-arch" manner to bear on a situation she imagined she understood. This put Leah more against the business than she was before. She pictured the ponderous privacy that would be accorded as a

## INTERVAL

right, and Bobby's feelings when confronted with the drawing-room and its upright piano heaped with comic songs printed on woolly paper, and bearing blottesque distortions of bouncing *comédiennes* upon their covers. So far she had concealed the family from him. When he called—always by pre-arrangement—to take her out, she had contrived to be ready in the hall. You could never reckon on that family; it would be a clever man who could propose, so to speak, *en parenthèse*, in that house! She wondered if "the poor child" knew what he was up against?

Put him off?

Mrs. Bounce, after sundry teasings of the cloth, 'received,' and retired after the meal. She showed firmness in the matter of drawing Ella with her. Ella had been her most ingénue at tea, she confidently expected to cut out Leah. Dainton barely glanced at her, and Ella began to "rally" the couple. At a loss, she became impertinent, under cover of giggles. Leah looked at her unmistakably several times; Ella returned the looks blandly, Leah could do little to her now after the bed-room *débâcle*. The shepherding action of her mother came as a genuine surprise to Ella, accustomed to being the indulged centre of attraction. She left laughingly, but there was a great deal of whispering in the hall, ending in the noisy slamming of a door. Leah grinned to herself. Bessie had

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been out for tea, but she presently tentatively entered the drawing-room. She displayed haste; asked Leah if she had seen "a book," and went out. Bobby and Leah smiled at each other, Dainton horribly afraid that he had been a cad. But it was an unrestful tête-à-tête, making Leah long for the silence-ban of a rehearsal to set gossip flowing. Bobby, so delightful to discover among the unfamiliar surroundings of *révue*, became, when viewed in a matrimonial light, no better than any other nice boy.

At last he clattered down his cup upon a carved stool.

"Of course you know what I've come about Leah?" he said quietly.

"Oh yes," answered Leah, crudely honest.

"Then I needn't beat about the bush." He was relieved. "Oh my Leah girl! my dad's paved the way at last for me! I'll chuck the rotten profession at once—I found I hated it after all when you left the company. You don't know what I went through on tour! And he's put me in the way of a permanent job too—nothing wildly exciting of course, but you'll be my excitement, and at least I shall be able to keep us both."

"My mother only sends me a small allowance. She might stop it if I married."

"What's that matter? You don't have to think of money, bless your heart! I don't have to have a wife with an income—now."

## INTERVAL

An obvious colloquialism occurred to her.

"You'd insure me against fire, or burglars, wouldn't you? But in wishing to hold the money-bags you are refusing me a loop-hole of escape in the event of your——of our——failing to hit it off. Oh dear! now you're cross with me for being right."

"Oh Leah, you say all that now—God knows I'd give you everything, I suppose it's selfishness, but I don't believe that girls think of these things if they really care for the man. You're trying to tell me you don't want me."

"Oh my dear! you're hopeless. I *do* want you, but I don't honestly think I'm the marrying sort."

"If that's all! every girl says that."

"But I mean it." Leah was annoyed. "There's too much——overtime——in marriage, and remember, I know myself as you could never hope to! I'm not ready for it, not in any way. If I could have the life I want—my fill of it—and if at the end I found it wasn't worth while after all, I'd say yes, gladly. But I must have my opportunity first; besides, I'm not easy to live with—ask the Bounces! I don't know even why I'm wasting your time discussing it, my mind was made up years before I met you."

He came to her chair and kissed her. "Yes, that was very nice Bobby, but it's a side issue."

"Very well dear, I believe you honestly

## FALSE GODDESSES

think all this now, but I shall hang on, all my life."

"That's splendid Bob!" She put her arm round his shoulders and kissed him. She was relieved. She was very fond of Bobby.

Quietly he left the house.

"And that's that?" speculated Leah.

## XI

A VAGUE desire for the Social Service ideal which had been aroused by the chapel activities, still held its own within Leah. There was surely something behind it? Something waiting to be better done, differently done at any rate?

Passing the Town Hall in the High Street one afternoon, Leah's attention happened to be caught by a notice in a wire frame. A lecture that evening. "You are Power." She decided to go. Bessie and Alice inexplicably offered to come too, and the three, strangely awkward in each other's company, reached the hall. When they were in their seats Leah regretted that she had come; she mistrusted the manner and appearance of those "with a mission," and was passively antagonistic to all such lectures, after the somewhat unpractical and uninteresting idealism of the Highest Thought School. Because of this a curious satisfaction filled her when the speaker, mounting the platform, proved to be normal looking.



## INTERVAL

He began, without rant, tiresome elaborate gestures, or pauses to drink from the tumbler by the carafe. He spoke of achievement as a 'duty,' of "doing what you wanted to," having what seemed to you best, and "seeing that you got it." The peculiar line rivetted Leah's attention from then on. He was sincere, in a cultured way ; made no attempts at vulgar persuasion. He was human in a large manner ; made quiet, colossal statements.

*"You are Christ on earth."*

That was his message.

"Now you'll think this is a pretty big proposition. It is. We can all win out, in that sense we're all equal, but we're all enwrapped in lesser or greater degrees of misapprehension of our rights . . . of course I don't mean to suggest that you should go right out of this hall to-night and perform what we call miracles. That isn't reasonable . . . you couldn't do it even in your working affairs. But I say this. You've to realise that we were *meant* to perform them. . . ."

He helped them with personal proofs, told them of years of death-in-life with a twisted spine. And of the day he rose, and entered the world again. It was the most commonplace portion of his address, but he sympathised with the mass whose endless cry is "show me"; knew that the majority would carry away this point alone.

"The Christian Scientists say 'there is no

## FALSE GODDESSES

pain.' That's wrong. There's plenty of pain and misery around, but it's what we've made possible ; so next time you fall ill, don't load it on to the Almighty. He can't help you more than you let him ; but if you pull your share, there'll come a time when you'll know beyond a possibility of doubt that these things that I have barely touched upon are at hand—at last."

Bessie, Alice and Leah left the hall in a silence that was not of mutual unease. . . . nothing would ever be quite the same again . . . they looked furtively at each other with a vast, vague understanding, an obliteration of old points of view. . . . Life resolved itself into a huge, a tremendous simplicity.

From that night, each in her own degree, the girls lived in a state of optimistic expectation. The possibilities seemed endless.

Salvation might come at any moment. . . .

## XII

VERY shortly after the New Year the Cedric Vernons gave one of their parties, and Leah happily made ready to go to it. She meant to enjoy herself, simply, humanly. Alice was fulfilling an engagement at Mrs. Craven's, to play the dance music, but the other two were disengaged. Leah was wearing a frock of petunia chiffon, with a high-waisted band of delft blue,

## INTERVAL

and a blue ribbon bound round her pale hair ; about the combined effect Mrs. Bounce refrained from criticism and turned to contemplation of Ella's eau-de-nil, and green sequin butterfly alighting on her curls.

The room was crammed. The Vernons were always enterprising ; seating capacity was never allowed to be an obstacle. Mrs. Vernon was in plum-coloured satin with an over-tunic of imperfectly agreeing amethyst velvet. Leah was especially charming to her ; she even managed to congratulate Diana upon her imitation of Harry Lauder. She was living in the moment, and it was all inexplicable fun. A middle-aged man was introduced to her ; Leah had noticed him in a temporary lull of amenities. She set herself to amusing him. He refused to be reft from her side by watchful Mrs. Vernon, whose method of entertaining consisted of a periodic outbreak of general post. If guests did not disintegrate at once, she would stand by them and make shooing movements with her forearms.

"That little person tells me she has been at the Varsity," he indicated Diana who, clad in a kilt, loud and clanless, was accepting hock-cup and compliments.

"Oh yes, we were there together. It was —smashing fun !"

Vyvyan West leant forward, interested.

"Were you indeed? I thought when you came in that perhaps you had some connection with the theatre, if I may say so ; besides, our

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host and hostess generally manage to get a lot of professionals to their parties. And what are you doing now?"

Leah answered "nothing," with serenity.

"Is that so?" He seemed to hesitate. "Well—I—if you'd care for a job, I'm doing the additional lyrics for the show at the Parthenon and I'll ask them to find room for you—if you'd like it? Only chorus I'm 'fraid, but it's town. The parts are all filled. I hope you don't mind?"

Leah looked at him a little bewildered. It was almost as if she was being offered a slice of her youth to live again; and this had come with almost crushing spontaneity by a few witty remarks. She neither hoped nor expected to shine upon the stage, but surely he must be the chosen agent that should set for her the machinery of Life in motion? It could not conceivably be coincidence. . . .

She smiled gratefully. "I should love it, and it's sweet of you."

"That's right" encouraged Vyvyan West beaming, "be at the theatre at eleven on Friday and I'll be there and introduce you to Edgar Barrett."

"Who are the principals?" Leah had outlived the habit of reading theatrical news.

"George Dimsdale's the comedian——"

"And the leading lady?"

"Jay Lewes."

Leah was at the theatre punctually, found

## INTERVAL

West in the foyer, and with him was elevated in an upholstered lift to the offices of the syndicate and managers.

It was odd to be taken care of, to have a place secured for you in this authoritative, cushioned manner. She had fended for herself overlong ; any suspicion of being armed through situations afflicted her with a tendency to fall over her own feet. She reflected that even a job in the chorus had to be procured you by a man !

She was introduced about ; treated rather as an only daughter back from school, and handed a contract *en passant* ; (" p' raps you'd like to glance through it? Let me have it back in the next few days and I'll mail you the confirmation. Well——so long old boy——by the bye, 'seen Eva lately? 'Saw her at the Monico the other night. Well——so long ! Good-bye Miss——er, so glad to have met you——").

Leah returned to Mimosa Road for lunch. This over (no more polka-mazurkas !) she and Ella strolled into the garden, now flooded with hard, premature spring sunlight, when Ella, falling back, gave a smothered sound of amazement, and snatched up the sheet of stiff paper headed 'Parthenon Theatre' from the piano. Rapidly she scanned it until the words 'Leah Lawrence' written in ink arrested her.

"What's this?" she cried in a metallic voice. Leah turned and assimilated the situation. She had not told Ella about Vyvyan West as they

## FALSE GODDESSES

walked home from the Vernons. It might have ended in nothing.

"That?" It was no use fencing. "Oh, that's my contract for the new show." Her heart was stirred with pity. Ella stared, tried to speak, wavered, and then went out of the room to cry her heart out upstairs.

What a shame it was! Should she give up her place to Ella, and would they accept the exchange if she did? One chorus girl was as good as another, and it was influence, not looks, that had got it for her. Ella was such a kid . . . how rawly she took disappointment! with what unstudied abandon and absence of pride. . . . And Leah didn't care much one way or the other.

Eventually she decided that she herself could do nothing in the matter.

Mrs. Bounce, her heart wrung, took to bringing back little presents for Ella. She constantly booked seats at theatres to 'take the child's mind off.' And Bessie had to be taken as well, or there would have been trouble.

## XIII

LEAH was idly curious at the first rehearsal to see the great Jay Lewes at close quarters; she remembered the impression she had created in Leah's mind that night when she had gone to the Corinth and seen her for the first time.



## INTERVAL

And now she might come in any minute! Meanwhile, the moments were packed with work and observation. The social side promised to be more confusing than it had been at the Varsity. There was only a family resemblance between the two theatres and their method, the Varsity being the poor-relation. The work itself was more evenly dispersed. It was a position to be a Parthenon show-girl. The dancers worked the hardest, and the *maître de ballet* would scoop them all off to the practice room at the top of the building on every possible occasion. He had drawn the majority of them from his school of dance in Conduit Street; in his own province, Maurice Falutino managed the management. His method with the chorus was a little chastened. For them, he prepared only the simplest steps. He had arranged the *ensembles* of many former productions.

Purses, parcels, and Miss Dillon's Pekinese would be laid aside, and the girls prepared unwillingly to learn the dances.

"Oh Maurice, what a rotten step!"

"We did it in '*Here We Are*'!"

"Miss Dillon. Come on my girl. Look. *Coupé, coupé, assemblé, jété*. Jump it. Hup!"

Miss Dillon and her friends were in the front row. They had been there for two years during the run of a former record-breaker, and one of them for a year before that. They drew nearly double the salary of the dancers.

## FALSE GODDESSES

The principals rehearsed apart. Leah came out of the green-room one afternoon and saw that Miss Lewes had arrived. The composer and her partner vied to bring her down to the matter in hand by loudly playing her numbers in her ear as she sat by one of the producers. He drew her attention to the duettists. She looked at them in a preoccupied manner and then held up a bunch of patterns to him. "I can't match it up," she said, "it's such a comic arunge." Then she suddenly rose, laughed, and advanced to the footlights. "Tum tiddle om pom,—— pom *pom*," said Miss Lewes, adding, "come on for the land's sake!"

She was a tall woman of the height du Maurier would have loved and drawn, and the wide, happy smile of Trilby. Her voice, husky and tuneful, with a strong American accent, rose a plaintive semitone at the end of every sentence, and carried to her hearers a very breath of the Southern fields of cotton of which she sang, and of the thrumming of banjos in the starry dusk. Music hall artists—those whose line was "slight impressions" of celebrities—found to their cost that cameos of Jay Lewes were not a matter of a 'good Yankee twang.'

Leah, observing her at all times, listened, and speculated and laughed. "Right foot, Miss Lawrence. La la la la, follow Miss Montagu." . . . .

She noticed that Miss Lewes, racy and domineering, never lost her temper. Disagreements,

## INTERVAL

if any, were presumably heard in camera. When anything was not to her liking, Jay Lewes would 'backchat' about it, generally concluding the matter in a ragging match, until even the worried musical director bent and giggled obscurely over his score. Otherwise, she was immeasurably above cheap assertions of her position. She was often late for rehearsal, and would be as full of comic excuses as a chorus girl, and this, and the fact that she sometimes arrived in her car, was about the only perquisite she reserved for herself. When brought into immediate contact with the chorus she seldom spoke; her jokes she dispersed among them impersonally.

And one morning, when the chorus kept their positions while the phrasing of "Tickets please for Dixie" was discussed by the composer and the conductor, Miss Lewes turned to Leah and spoke. Leah could never remember after what it was she had said, realised that the remark applied to whoever stood nearest; but "Tickets please" was suddenly a better tune than she had thought, and Miss Dillon and Miss Montagu not quite so impossible to work with. And as she went out with the others, she saw Jay Lewes look at her again until her attention was claimed.

# FALSE GODDESSES

## XIV

ONE evening when the show had been running a month, the Sergeant leant out of his pen as Leah flew past.

"Miss!" Leah turned.

"Hul-lo!"

"Will you take this note to Miss Lewes, number two on the first floor?"

"Right you are." Sudden excitement invaded Leah. At number two she achieved a thump.

"Who's thayur?" A dresser hastily blocked the entrance. "One of the chorus ladies, Miss Lewes," she said over her shoulder. "Come on in," sang out the latter, and the dresser, appeased, trundled down the passage.

Miss Lewes was reading in a kimono by her fire, and only her face, lightly made up, seemed ready for the imminent performance.

"Yes deeur, what is it?" she turned a page and not her head.

"I—they asked me to bring you up this note," faltered Leah.

Miss Lewes turned in her chair, extending her hand, looked full at her visitor for a long second. Then quietly: "Sit right down, I'll see if thayur's an answer. . . no, it's only—" the note was tossed aside. "An' what's your name anyhow deeur?"

"I—I'm Leah Lawrence."

## INTERVAL

“O Leahur Lawrence, eh? well Leahur, you remind me of someone I used t’know—a real beautiful woman, an’ my greatust pal on earth.” She appraised Leah, then, “an’ look at hur cunning little hat!” Tweaking it off, she tried it on before the mirror.

“Funny little thing! say, whayur did you get it?”

“I made it.” Alice had helped her. Leah was amused.

“Make me one too,” Miss Lewes relinquished it.

“I’d love to.” Leah wondered if she meant it.

“No! will you really though? D’ye mean it?”

Seriously she gave her instructions. “An’ mind an’ make it big enough, I’ve got a real large head, an’ don’t——” her dresser entered, and into her hands Miss Lewes, docile, consigned herself. “Come in an’ see me again Leahur,” she cried, her voice half smothered with the swathes of her costume.

Oh well, of course she didn’t mean it!

Leah combated hero-worship, pushed, fought sensation from her. She turned to dressing-room life, but its unresponsiveness drove her in upon herself again. She began to take an interest in home affairs; there was always the position of oil-pourer open to her who cared to accept it. Ella, of course, was difficult to play Samaritan to, and then she had not yet recovered from the

## FALSE GODDESSES

Parthenon business, although the social barometer suffered rapid changes, as her agent held out hopes. Friendliness from Leah she would construe as 'side.' Alice was out until the time for Leah to leave for the theatre ; they only met at breakfast, these days.

It was with Bessie, always available, that Leah made the most headway ; she was glad, too, to believe that she was making life a little brighter for her. She discovered with real surprise that Bessie had qualities, and it was pleasant to be clung to and confided in, and to have your advice asked at every hand's turn ! Suspicion once removed, it threatened to become embarrassing. Leah wondered how they were ever going to " unhitch." With Mrs. Bounce it was quite easy to be nice. She only wanted you to help her with the shopping.

Between them, Leah and Bessie threshed out the subject of Eustace Burrowes. Bessie, dammed for weeks, exhibited now a primitive unreticence. Patiently Leah extracted the facts from the muck-heap of rancour and sentiment.

Eustace had called as usual after " that " Sunday. Leah had missed this ; she had been to tea and supper with Anne. Here Bessie began to ramble. Much hesitation and pressing. It seemed that Bessie had been so " stiff " with him that her parents had " spoken " to her when he had gone. Ella had been out too ; Mrs.



## INTERVAL

Bounce told Bessie afterwards that she had bought her a ticket for a Sunday League concert at the Palladium to get her out of the way, had also given her the money for her tea. "But if they think he'll only be nice to me because Ella isn't there,——"

Leah stopped all that, although she saw the girl's point.

"Then what happened?" It took all night to get the kernel out of Bessie in spite of the amount she talked.

"Then he wrote——"

"What?"

"Oh——I don't know?"

"Got the letter?"

"No!" Bessie was indignant, "as if I should keep his letters!"

"But you must remember what line he took!"

Leah began to be impatient; Bessie in the rôle of not remembering a letter from a man was a bit thick! and if she had really forgotten, it was only another instance of the fool-muddle she had made of the whole affair.

Well, Eustace had 'offered' to break it off. . . .

"And what did you answer?"

Leah pounced it at her.

"I didn't answer, if he feels like that about it——"

"How long since he wrote?"

"Oh—some time, I don't know exactly."

## FALSE GODDESSES

Leah thought rapidly. She was calculating whether the offer still remained open to Bessie, and it was maddening to have no data. In any case, she thought, Bessie should seize him while the seizing was even nominally "good"; but she couldn't tell her that, and Bessie was looking conscious, and gloomily important. But she relied upon Leah's pronouncement; it was obvious that the match was in her hands. Leah meant to be scrupulous in her treatment of the plotless episode.

"You'd better write to him—now."

"What shall I say?"

"M'm. Say that you didn't answer until now because his letter was such a surprise and shock—and all that—that you didn't know what to say, but expected to see him and wondered why he had given up coming. Err-er, but that there has evidently been a mutual misunderstanding, and that you expect him as usual on Sunday. And for God's sake Bessie don't mention Ella!"

Bessie hurpled downstairs in search of stationery.

But a few evenings later Miss Lewes, dropping the arm she had been waving at the audience as the curtain fell on the interval, turned, saw Leah, and said: "Well, when you comin' along t'see me? Come an' have a smoke now—or aftur you're changed."

## INTERVAL

"That's it, sit in the arm-chayur," said Jay Lewes, catching sight of Leah Lawrence at the door in her glass. She was pressing her hair with her finger tips as she spoke. She put down an orange-stick.

"Now, come right in whenever you feel like it, I sh'll always be pleased to see you d'ry." The dresser was already hovering; the fifteen minutes might have been five. "Now listen, girl," Jay Lewes put an arm round Leah's shoulders and cuddled her up, "take the advice of one who knows an' don't let on I've asked you in, we don't want t' make trouble with the girls. Come along every little while, like I say, an' if I can't see you, I c'n just say so an' we shall both understand, hey?—oh Alus, about that payur of shoes?

Tell the messenger——"

Leah was dismissed.

A time began for Leah of the first undiluted happiness she had ever known; she lived the minute she entered the theatre.

The dressing-room overlooked her friendship with the leading-lady. It would not have believed it. Miss Lawrence——she had won no abbreviation——was not even a show-girl although she was in the front row. Damn sauce. But they tolerated her in deference to the influence that must have been at work on her behalf.

The company gave a supper on the stage to celebrate the 100th performance. Leah, when

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first she heard of it—it was not definitely announced, it somehow permeated each room—anxiously reviewed her evening gowns. She only desisted when it occurred to her that it was more than likely she would not be invited. However, everyone was asked, or rather, it percolated through the chorus that no one would be actually refused admission. The management often took the line of “all-a-happy-family”—especially in the press. On the night, the girls dispersed to change without the usual rush for last trains.

Footlights and battens were full on, the last scene had been struck, but black curtains had been lowered to conceal the brick walls with their “*No Smoking*” and “*Exit*” cards.

In the tiresome matter of her frock Leah, raging at the necessity, had gone to Mrs. Bounce. It was not her way to ask for help, and she hated the appearance of dependence. She mentioned the matter, and waited for the help she knew would be offered as a matter of course, before adding awkwardly: “Of course I’ll pay you back for it, only I’ve spent so much this week.” “Oh we’ll see about that,” answered Mrs. Bounce easily. She was accustomed to coaxings, to pledges of payment that were comfortably forgotten. Leah always paid to the day—but then she hardly ever borrowed. They went to a “tame” dressmaker who could generally suit “Miss Lawrence’s peculiar style.” Mrs. Bounce still forgot at times that

## INTERVAL

the girls were now adolescent, and went with Leah to the first fitting. Leah suffered her as she was advancing the money. Leah was managing her allowance better now ; this time, it had not been her fault, the draft had arrived late, and there were many little expenses in connection with the Parthenon.

Ella, a willing parasite on parental bounty, was always a little brutal to her mother over the dressmaker's head. She had no originality. Leah seethed with ideas and now tactfully overruled Mrs. Bounce, who clung to the idea of "white." Leah would be overcome with impatience at the cloying ideals of Mrs. Bounce's youth. But now Mrs. Bounce acquiesced ; after all, Leah was not her own daughter, she had to remind herself of this. She had accepted one more girl in the family for so many years. Baulked of her management of Leah's dress, she still ventured to give it her superfluous tweaks while Leah "stood off." Leah became as her own tables, meet for last touches.

The orchestra consented to play during supper, the table stretched almost to either wing, and, respectable chairs having run out, the overflow was accommodated on benches and thrones of every style and period from the property-room. Jay Lewes, in her gown of clinging chiffon velvet, the hue of mellow ivory, sat at the head of the table. She sat slackly in repose, her fingers enlaced on her knee. The dignified

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carven throne with its narrow back surmounted with a crown, threw into relief the gleaming folds, the dark of her eyes and hair. The generous mouth drooped, the eyes held reserved pathos. Leah thought, "she has the saddest face I've ever seen." It gave her an incredulous shock. But she knew Jay would tune up, punctual to the minute.

As the places near her rapidly filled, Miss Lewes led the fooling with relish. If anyone amused her, she contributed her husky "hah!" to the general hilarity. She took no notice of Leah. Leah could laugh, now. Jay had come to mean peace.

It was the dawn of the spirit.

Wedged between the principal comedian and one of the most unapproachable of the show girls—who ran a small car on a salary of three pounds a week—but whom the sweet champagne had slightly thawed, Leah joined in local japes. She flirted with Mr. Dimsdale who, having worked off his duty-jokes, soon became quite funny.

"My God Dimmy, why can't you do it in the show?" plaintively enquired the stage-manager.

"Shut up Harry. I'm going to have some fun with Birdie here," he indicated one of Maurice Falutino's indefatigables. After an early call for rehearsal of a new number, a matinée, evening performance, and glass of wine, she was half asleep. "Oh it's a shame, she's all in!" Jay Lewes called out, "don't Dimmy, the poor



## INTERVAL

kiddy!" "You watch," replied that gentleman, and disentangling himself gingerly from his bench to avoid waking Miss Merrick, asleep at last, he whispered to the conductor who raised his bâton. To the offended ear of the company sounded their opening chorus, 101st performance. 'Birdie' sprang dazedly up and went through the movements, chirping the challenging words forlornly. It brought her to her fuddled senses to find the audience in the wrong place. "Very nice Birdie," said Dimsdale approvingly, "'let you know in a few days. Have we your address?"

"Am I really blind?" she asked good-naturedly, and fell heavily asleep on his shoulder.

## XV.

LEAH had now been at the Parthenon several months. One Saturday she hurried upstairs late, and glimpsed Jay in the passage. She was with friends; they seemed to be chaffing her about her hat. It was a species of small French Revolution *chapeau-bras* which an artist had designed for her, and which she had garnished with a tricolor rosette, to his shrugging disapproval. "It's a perfectly good hat," Miss Lewes defended, "Go on! go on! say it's the face underneath it!"

"It's a perfectly good face——"

"Hah! now really I——"

## FALSE GODDESSES

Miss Lewes had been at a lunch-party at the Ritz ; Leah was vanishing round the corner, when she interrupted farewells in her tunesome shout ;

“ Say Leahur ! ” Leah turned ; Jay lowered her voice. “ Want t’ see you to-night, slip down aftur the fishing numbur : you won’t find me, but wait, I’ll tell Alus t’ let you in. That’s all dear.” She turned rapidly ; “ Good-bye. Saturday next ? No, I can’t manage——Sunday, what ? Come around to the flat Sunday week, I’m having a crowd. ’Must go—— ” She went into her dressing-room.

In the oasis of rest for the chorus soon after the start of Act 2, Leah knocked at Miss Lewes’ door ; she was instantly admitted by Alice and invited to “ take a seat and have a cigarette ; Miss Lewes left the box there for you.”

Leah, smoking feverishly, watched her as she tidied the dressing-table and replaced stage hats in their boxes.

The runs at the Parthenon were always long, and when Miss Lewes took possession of number 2, she settled in, as she knew, for many months, and dealt in her own way with the room. The walls were papered a pale, restful buff, and the window, that overlooked the court where the pit and gallery crowds gathered, was hung with curtains of golden damask of a deeper shade. Her own electric lights had been installed ; one, sole representative of the original scheme, which hung, inconveniently, from the centre of the

## INTERVAL

ceiling, had been softened with an alabaster bowl suspended by slender gold chains. A shaded light over the full-length mirror opposite the fireplace, a headlight above the French inlaid dressing-table, and two on movable stands on either side, a thick pile carpet of the prevailing sunny tone, several comfortable chairs and a sofa heaped with black cushions completed the *décor*. The stage frocks were immured in a large oak cupboard, the odds-and-ends in a valuable tall-boys "picked up" at a sale.

There were a few good portraits, unsigned, a water-colour of Miss Lewes' American home, and, alone on the wall facing the door, a little pastel of a child's head, smiling, dark-haired. Leah noticed it in detail for the first time. It was hung where Jay could catch sight of it whenever she entered. . . .

When Miss Lewes came in, Leah sensitively tore her eyes from it. Jay was humming; the number had gone well. The song proper was given by her partner, the asides alone were her contribution. The somewhat peculiar result was a "Jay Lewes" speciality. English audiences took to it at once.

*"Say could you ever look fondly on me?"*  
(How's your mothur?)

*"Where do you come from, who can you be?"*  
(Get out! wh'd'you mean?)

*"Say could you sometimes give me a smile?"*  
(Not in a suit like that!)

*"How my heart beats when your face I see."*  
(His heart beats! Ha, Hah!)

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*" Winter an' summer*

(Why not summur an' wintur?)

*" I'm longing for you,———*

(Now I thought I'd seen you somewhere !  
I did miss sixpence out of the dressing-  
room las' Wednesday———)

*" Summer and winter———*

(Look here, I suggested that a moment  
ago an' you turned me down !)

*" I'm feeling so blue,*

*" All day I'm moaning, 'groaning and 'phoning*

*" Say, could you ever like me?*

(No !)

" All right Alus, I c'n manage. Leave your Jay fur ten minutes."

Miss Lewes walked about adding powder and polishing her nails, then she pulled aside the curtains and leant out into the warm stillness of the June afternoon. A small crowd began to collect, attracted by her glittering little hat. She drew in abruptly. "Hah!" she shouted amusedly, "Oh London, you're a comic city. Can't you let old Jay get a breath o' fresh air without rubberin' around?"

Leah looked furtively at the little pastel.

If Jay could have been her own mother, in place of this erratic stranger singing her way about Australia! And it would have been possible too, that was the worst. Leah was not yet twenty.

"My deer, your Missus——what's-hur-name—Bounce," began Jay Lewes; "God what a name! did someone wish it on hur or is it natural? D'you think she'd let you come

## INTERVAL

an' stay a few days? I'm rather off things—I'm feel'n lonely, like the song." She pulled Leah down beside her in the biggest armchair, irremediably creasing their dresses. Jammed together, she rested her head on Jay's shoulder, and leisurely sniffed scent. Jay refused even Leah the name of her favourite; Leah would dog her in the wings trying to locate the blend. Miss Lewes, conscious of the pursuit, once said "All right my girl! you'll never get it, take it from me." She had flapped her handkerchief in Leah's face while she stood waiting for her cue. "Take a bath in it honey! oh Mike——," and pushed her aside while her partner gagged the hiatus.

Jay's eyes, seen so close, looked paradoxically small and brilliant, with their separate lashes beaded with water-black. Leah memorized every detail; the unnoticed irregularity of two teeth, the pin-points of shadow in the ears which had been pierced years before for the rings she never wore——.

"And the conclusion?" said Jay quietly.

"I want to tell you something——don't laugh. When I was a flapper——"

"When she was a flappur! get out, wh'd'you mean?"

"Am I being a bore?"

"Go right on *deeur*."

"I'd left school and there was an awful hiatus, and I ended by taking a flat and the girl I lived with left me in the lurch and it was all——hor-

## FALSE GODDESSES

rible. Well—I went back to the Bounces. Then I came to town one night and saw you for the first time in “*Grin and Bear It*”. . . . Jay, you don’t know what it was to go home in the rain in a crowded train back to the Bounces. You seemed to me to be exactly what I had always been looking for even then, but I knew what it meant to cry for the moon. I’ve always just——missed——everything. I snatch at things, but I’m “in it but not of it”; I’m not always even ‘in’ it! And then after all this time I met Vyvyan West and he got me on here, and I remembered, and thought how exactly “me” it was to get what I wanted when I’d left off wanting it. And then, old Anderson sent me up here with a note . . . and you spoke to me in your most——Jay-ish——way, and I went upstairs and hugged a girl I simply loathe. She thought I was mad! Now do you begin to see the sort of fool I am?”

“My dear, you’re every sort of a fool there is, an’ I like it. Any woman would.”

“Even now I can’t believe I’m here. I’m waiting for you to say something cutting and turn me out——”

“We don’t all come up to expectations,” said Jay, “an’ it’s a v’ry big thing to live up to a child’s ideal.” She turned her face away for a moment, “I wish enough I’d known you were in front, I’d’ve sent fur you t’come around an’ see me.”

“You lovely dear! with all your friends——”



## INTERVAL

"Oh well, I don't want 'em all the time. Times I just sit about twiddlin my thumbs an' thinkin of the old folks at home." Jay Lewes raised her head and kissed Leah. Then she rose saying, "an' now I must paint an expression on me against the next spasm downstairs." She seated herself at the dressing table, catching Leah's eye in the glass.

"Oh Jay ! if you smile any wider your mouth will tie in a neat bow behind, like the dragon in the story."

"Dragon?" chanted Miss Lewes interrogatively, "wh'd'you mean?" She picked up a stick of carmine and suddenly laughed.

"Hah!" she shouted, and fell to pencilling her mouth. Presently :

"Say d'ry you'd better beat it or one of us'll get into trouble. Come back Leahur" she called the moment the door was shut.

Leah waited beside her ; then she swerved, took Leah's hands. "How are you gettin' on upstairs, eh?"

Leah shrugged.

"They've got wind of the fact that I come down to see you between whiles. You can imagine it all. One girl asked me yesterday in a perfectly friendly way 'if I was hanging round you for a part in the next show'? She would have thought a lot more of me if I'd said yes."

"Oh——darn 'em ! Look here, honey-lamb, when you're dressed to-night just skip

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down an' climb into the car an' wait f'r me. Have a little grip with what you'll need for a few days an'——"

A youthful voice intoned down the passage. The call-boy appeared.

"Land's name, an' what's the matter with you?" demanded Miss Lewes, rumpling his hair. He grinned. "Miss Lewes" he repeated mechanically.

"Tommy wants me if the audience don't," remarked Miss Lewes. Taking Master Simmons' hand in hers, she scuttered down the passage.

## XVI

LEAH almost ran up Mimosa Road. The house was cool and still; the noise of grinding came from the kitchen. She entered in the usual vacuum between tea and supper. Her own meal was a heavy problem to Mrs. Bounce; Leah, she recognized, could not be expected to conform to the 7.30 régime, and after much worried thought, she compromised on a tray in the dining-room. Under protest the servant agreed to heat soup, but for the rest, it was understood that Leah's supper must be strictly 'cold.' Even then there was perpetual friction.

The family was panting on assorted chairs in the garden. Mr. Bounce had returned earlier

## INTERVAL

than usual and had brought in a bag of strawberries. Bessie had managed to mess her dress with her helping, and was sulky. She looked like a melting dummy ; her neck was suggestive of pink sago. Ella looked frustrated as Leah appeared at the window ; it meant one more hand in the bag, and Leah had her salary now as well as an allowance ! It had been going so well too, only Alice, in her tiresome conscientiousness, reminded father that Leah would be in any minute. And now here she was posing at the window with that silly unearthly look on her face !

“Come along missy and have some strawberries.” Automatically Leah stepped out ; the fruit was as sawdust in her mouth. Time was short, she must get out of this.

“Mrs. Bounce dear, don’t expect me back to-night. I—I’ve been—Jay Lewes has asked me to stay the week-end with her. It won’t put you out any, will it ?” She even enlarged upon details of clothes and hand-bags ; she would have humoured anyone. . . .

Ella ceased her excursions into the bag ; she too experienced the effects of emotion upon appetite, it was in its way a triumph of mind over matter. Her face seemed to peak before Leah’s eyes, her mouth was fretful, her eyes calculating. Wasn’t it enough that Leah had got the Parthenon over her head ? and now, through some incredible management, she had caught the eye of Jay Lewes, of all people in this world ; why,

## FALSE GODDESSES

heaven alone knew what it might lead to ! Leah might get parts. . . . Curiosity tore her, primarily.

“ How did you get to know her ? ” she said brusquely.

“ Oh—I don’t know.”

“ But you *must* know. It seems rather funny ! ” Ella’s tone was sour ; “ do the other girls get asked too ? ”

“ Not that I know of.” Leah held all the cards, but she would not be embroiled. It was, too, impossible to suggest that she herself was not quite as the others, and Ella saw that. Her very unease and irascibility showed it.

Mrs. Bounce went in to wash her hands before supper and track Leah with suggestions of what to pack. Leah had settled the question in the Underground on the way home ; but she was very gentle with Mrs. Bounce.

In his study Mr. Bounce read the late extra.

In the little garden the girls sat alone. A sweltering stillness hung menacing ; it would be light until past nine. The smallest sound was audible, the voice of the servant, raised in song, cut rawly.

“ Well——, this is the latest ! ” Ella’s voice was dry ; “ Leah’s always running after someone.” Bessie shifted in her deck-chair, complaining of the heat.

“ I expect she’ll have a wonderful time.” Alice sighed softly. A little breeze cooled them

## INTERVAL

for a second, and the leaves clapped gently together, scenting a shower, and applauding the idea. "I shouldn't wonder if we had a storm to-night," Alice added.

Ella said nothing.

Leah hurried to the station ; almost would she have paused to let the joys of departure penetrate more fully. The by-roads were quiet in evening peace, the day was warmly dying. It all stifled her. Over the way, white figures still darted in the tennis-courts. Leah heard Dicky Thurloe's voice. Soon the night would come, translucent, blue. Soon she would be in another world, of strolling crowds, arc lights with their white effulgence, the tireless magic of Piccadilly in summer . . . the Moorish Alhambra, bright-lit below, capped with domes and slender aspiring crescent in silhouette ; the Empire festooned with globes of light ; the Parthenon. . .

## XVII

IN her flat, Jay Lewes sat on the bath meditatively scooping pink crystals in a glass spoon from a bowl, and letting them plop, plop, into the water and dissolve in soapy clouds of steam. Leah Lawrence, trailing by in her dressing-gown, said she was going to bed.

"M'nah !" responded Miss Lewes absently. Five minutes later, "Leahur ! t'lphone !"

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Leah darted to answer the belated call. "What is't?" sang out Miss Lewes. Leah ran to the bath-room door and shouted, "Mr. Dimsdale. Picnic on the river to-morrow. Can you go? He says he forgot to tell you this evening——"

"Oh——Dimmy, what? Tell him——I d'no. Tell him I'm wrapped in thought an'll let him know latur."

"Dimmy" disposed of, she began to sing in her bath in her ruminative Southern voice. Leah, from the first, came and listened outside. Jay didn't mind who heard, and she sang with all the Lewes mannerisms because she was the same personality, on the stage or off it. She interpolated the band 'bits' quite seriously; Leah shook with strangled laughter.

"*Ur—ur! ta da da da da*, till ready," murmured Miss Lewes in a business-like voice; the "*ur—ur!*" was the trombone, Leah recognized.

*"Oh honey come to those fields of cotton*

*"No moerr night-clubs f'r me (pom! pom! pom!)"*

*"Don't stop to ask y'r dad*

*"Tell'm you'll be good an glad*

*"When-your-home-you-see (ta da da),*

*"The big ship's sail'n f'r that (pom!) Southern shore*

*"I guess you won't see your baby's face anee more*

*"So come on honey t' those (umph!) fields of cotton*

*"Down in deeur old Tahnissee. (Tiddle-iddle-iddle-om-pom! !)."*

She put Leah in a small room next her own. Her guest, having listened and laughed her fill,



## INTERVAL

was sitting on the bed thinking. It was obviously impossible this should have happened. She was probably still in the dressing-room, had dozed off in the heat and chatter ; or perhaps she had fainted in the Mimosa Road house, would struggle back to find Mrs. Bounce being efficient with cold water. Momentarily she uneasily expected the return of the spirit to her body, sitting propped in its chair in the Vernon's drawing-room. She hoped her shell was making adequate responses to everyone . . . was being passably witty to Vyvyan West. . . .

A syncopated tattoo was performed on the door, which half opened to admit a breath of scent, a delicate puff of tobacco, and an arm which dropped a silken heap at her feet.

“ O Jay ! you smell just like a music-hall ! ”

“ Hah ! ” from without, “ only needs the arunge-peel, what ? ”

“ What's the meaning of this attention ? ”

“ You put 'em on, it's just a nightie an' wrap-pur ; got 'em at Marcelle's but I looked like the scrub-lady in 'em, kind've tired. Hurry up an' come along in next door an' we'll talk—we shan't get much chances next few days. Hurry ! ” The door closed.

With careless haste Leah put on the nile-green *crêpe-de-chine* and satin wrapper of the same shade sprayed with a flight of black velvet swallows. Everything was a good six inches too long, she only reached a little above Jay Lewes' shoulder, and the draperies swirled

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loosely on her slighter figure. Stumbling, she knocked and was answered by a "Ha'hm" of permission from Miss Lewes, whose mouth was full of toffee. Her practised eye raked Leah as she swallowed the sweet.

"I knoo you'd look sweet in it with your funny hayur. I'll get Alus to alter it f'r you, we'll take it along on Monday." She lay on her bed propped with cushions, Leah, in an arm-chair, her feet upon another.

"Where y'r slippurs, in the name of the last turn on the bill?"

"Oh—I forgot them," Leah was happily indifferent, "everything was so thrilling," she added.

"Thrill'n? Wh'd'you mean? Put on a pair've mine. Caperin' around an' catching your death . . . remember the woman I told you you were like?"

Leah nodded, her dark eyes suddenly resentful.

"She was always gett'n worked up into spells too. . . ." There was a long pause. Abruptly Jay Lewes said :

"You saw that little picture in my dress'n-room?" Leah assented, faintly.

"My little girl. She died. Only five years old. It's a gay gaudy old life, ain't it?"

Leah waited, stricken, rejecting the banality of sympathy. And——would it have rung true? For a moment she saw herself unfit. . . . But the sick second passed.

## INTERVAL

In the street far below a taxi passed. Leah followed the sound until it seemed the very concentration of thought must place her inside it, driving away from dream-life . . . how fatally easy to leave . . . how strange to pass out into the night, to cut herself voluntarily off——

What was Jay saying?

"I'd like you should know about her. She was a real old handful,——just like her mother! . . . land! how that kid could imitate! You sh'd've heard her taking off the way I worked my numburs, I could see it was me, right enough. I was in a v'ry small way then . . . rotten theatres, one song an' a spit kind o' thing, an' parts in road companies in the States when I c'd get 'm. This pal've mine . . . she was a dear! We caught on to each other at once. You'd 've just loved her as I did . . . she was with me night my Babs died. She cut the show t' be with me. Of course she got the sack an' I wasn't any too well off myself——we always used t'be borrowing fr'm each other those days . . . she was a year or so older than me. Her name was Mary Conder."

"Dinkie Conder . . . it was long before your time, Leahur, about——what? . . . I married at nineteen. Gosh! it's like goin' back to Noah. But we did that sort 've thing in those days. It mus' be——I d'no! Can't do the sum. Dear only knows what happened to her . . . it was a great grief t' me. I got about fed up with

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America after that little snack an' came ovur here an',——well, I managed t' come just at a time when folk in my line o' business fr'm ovur there were becoming the thing in London. I had a few letters of introduction, too . . . I called myself Lewes, though heaven knows my real name's Shelley, an' my married one van Osten. Say, you didn't know I was married? Aha! an' the maiden looked modestly down! So it's quite a homely little barg'n basement t' choose from, eh? . . . I meant t' make good here, an' I love my work an' my friends, an' I never mean t' let the past spoil the present——or the future. I'm not out f'r sob-stunts. . . .

I never saw Dinkie again, but I left f'r England myself four months later . . . I wonder good an' often if she ever thinks 've poor old Jasmine——”

“Who's that?” Leah asked sharply, her brain at strained attention.

“You may well ask! Why *me* of course. That, if you please, was the low-comedy name my mothur had t' pick on of all the others in the 'phone-book! It was good enough for the kind o' songs I used t' sing, but I quit the blue-sash business soon after I landed. Jasmine! an' look at me. Now——do I *look* like a Jasmine, anyhow? Any more questions?”

“And——your husband, is he dead?”

“Wh'd'you mean! is he dead? Not this time! He's one of the biggest managers ov'r the othur side, bless his old heart, an' when I

## INTERVAL

met him he was comickin' in the chorus. He's a real nice man—I like him v'ry much, an' when I get a chance I'm goin' to go back to renew old acquaintance an' shake him by the hand. I havn't seen him f'r more than a few days at a time f'r more than nineteen years . . . it's a lifetime !

An' now my dear one you got to go right t'bed——.” Leah rose wearily. Jay Lewes hugged her close.

“H'm. I remember you first morning I came to rehearsal. 'Funny how things turn out. . . .”

## XVIII

WAKING early, Leah let realisation crash upon her consciousness. “Miss Lewes is on the balcony,” said the maid, putting down the brass can.

Entrenched in footlights of pink geranium, and sheltered by an awning of green linen, Jay Lewes poured coffee. Letters and newspapers were stacked on the matting which mitigated the chill of the zinc floor. The balcony was small, and Leah sat on a cushion and leant against a drain-pipe. Below, the traffic of Knightsbridge was yet a trickle ; the cool air was golden ; it would be a day of scorching heat.

Miss Lewes leant over and waved ; her friend had been for an early ride. She threw him a roll

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which he missed. It bounded in at the door of the florist opposite. . . .

In Mimosa Road the family would already be dispersed after a heating meal of bacon or sausages absorbed within four walls ; by the time they went out the day would already be staling. Mr. Bounce and Alice would gulp a little of the splendour, but it would avail them nothing, more walls were waiting for them to which they must hurry.

The original week-end suggested by Miss Lewes had been prolonged from day to day.

Jay Lewes had more engagements than she could fulfil ; she did her unsystematic utmost to dovetail them, requests for her presence at fêtes, songs at expensive side-shows at charity bazaars, turns at special matinées. To several of the former types of entertainment she begged Leah to accompany her, mendaciously asserting that she " didn't know a single soul, h'ny." At these crowded functions, Leah found that her own part consisted of taking care of Jay's bag hastily flung, of suddenly dumped boxes of chocolate, the flowers that she was given, and her occasional purchases at society's stalls. Leah generally contrived to lose her a few minutes after entering the rooms, and had more than once been forced to go home alone, after searches in which she was elbowed by the titled and theatrical, bent on pushing their wares. Back in the flat, sitting on the divan by the window, the old trouble would surge up, and she



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would feel unspeakably alien. And then the key would click in the lock. . . .

This aspect was brought home with force at a garden fête at which Jay Lewes had a stall, staffed with underlings composed of quite respectably large names in the vaudeville world. Leah, diffident protests overborne, stood behind it handing up goods which Miss Lewes rapidly palmed off. "Some swindle," she reassured the M.P., taking gold for the cushion-cover she had wrapped round his shoulders.

A little schoolgirl had evaded authority and insinuated herself to the forefront, too shy to purchase, and Leah, picturing the child's return to some home of realities, saw the much-kissed twopenny post-card that probably lay at night under her pillow.

Leah thought, "There, but for the grace of God. . . ." Stooping, she whispered, "would you like her autograph?" and the child's lips parted in speechless assent. Leah contrived to catch Jay's attention, and when she had assimilated the request, the latter, calling for pencil and paper, bent down, scribbled her name, and made herself delightful to the bewildered child. Leah, watching, knew that she was being kind only to be cruel, for it would hurt more afterwards. . . .

When no Parthenon matinée or social obligation was toward, they would lunch at home and then drive West-ward to see the show at some

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other theatre or hall, where a box or stalls was always forthcoming. At one theatre, where, rejoicing for a change in a popular run and a box-office distracted by the purring of the telephone, even Miss Lewes' name could do nothing for her. They pushed their way into the long-full pit, and, "this brings me back m'youth" said Jay "but I'd rathur stand than be done."

It was a never-staling amusement to watch for the stare-and-second-look in the street when she went out with Jay, and for the more frequent discreet indication in restaurants. It was not Jay Lewes in mufti that was remarkable, it was her voice, above all, her laugh, that betrayed her.

On Sundays, if the weather displayed indecision, a number of friends came to the flat, and she would sit looking, Leah thought, oddly like any "ordinary" hostess, dispensing Russian tea and black coffee, being sweepingly forgetful of idiosyncracies in the matter of sugar. Leah sometimes overcome by a throw-back to High School shyness, 'did' the daughter of the house. There were times, if guests were few and intimate, when she did not know where to put herself "for the best," as Bessie would say. Once she had mumbled a fatuous excuse and made a bolt, tripping over the tiger-skin as she went. Jay asked her "if they were borin' hur, an' what was the matter, anyway?" After that she remained, whoever might be present.

Inevitably Leah came to know many theatri-

## INTERVAL

cal magnates by sight, and some to speak to. Potential power was within her grasp, but it hardly occurred to her to utilize it. James Cantrall, pilot of *révue*, even offered her a small part, and for a moment she wavered; but when she learnt that rehearsals were to start immediately, she refused. Later on, perhaps. . .

One Sunday Jay Lewes arranged to go with a party to Maidenhead for lunch and tennis, tea at the Vyvyan West's, and supper and dancing at Murray's.

They assembled in the drawing-room; Cantrall, Gladys Friar, the dancer under his management at the Corinth, Hood the artist, Dimsdale, Allen, Jay Lewes' partner, and sundry of the rest of the Parthenon crowd. Wrench, controller of three of the largest halls in London, came in late. They lingered over a brew of coffee, and a shower suddenly began, followed by thunder. "We can't go now; it'll do this funny business on and off all day," said Dimsdale. "Well, you can't stay here," answered his hostess; "there's no food."

"Let's ring up people in the phone-book," suggested the dancer; "we can shut our eyes and pick, and we have to speak to whoever it happens to be."

"What about my good tuppences?" objected the owner.

"Should think you might stand it on your salary," said Dimsdale, "come on Miss Lawrence." They left, and various calls were con-

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ducted in grunts and shrieks of laughter.

"Here——I can't stand this ; I'm not goin' t'let it be said that any guest o'mine enjoyed himself !" Jay Lewes swept them from the telephone.

"Go away Jay Lewes," said Dimsdale ; "you're spoiling my day."

"Hold y'r tongue, old funny man, you're speak'n with it, an' I've had my day spoilt by experts——."

Later she was heard in conversation with a nursing home, and the watchman at Waring and Gillow. Returning to the drawing-room, "I'm afraid there may be a nurse comin'," she said resignedly, and smoked, subdued. "We'll take her out to lunch," consoled Hood. Roused, they packed into the cars waiting outside and skimmed to the Berkeley. Afterwards, they went back to the flat and did a melodrama. It was Jay Lewes's idea ; "I've always wanted my chance," she complained.

Hood ran up some of his atmospheric posters and affixed them in every room. He put a 'House Full' notice outside the front-door. "Don't put any notices over the wash-basin, you want them to be seen !", said Allen.

Jay Lewes annexed the rôle of villain, Gladys Friar was given a walk-on and not allowed to dance ("we want this to be good") ; there were no claimants for the persecuted heroine who died in the snow. Allen played it in a tailor-made of Miss Lewes's ; Leah was the unwanted child

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who died with him. Wrench was set to cutting out snow ; Cantrall, placing years of hard-bitten experience at their disposal, offered to write the book. They let him work the snowstorm with Hood and the waves with Dimsdale.

" Damned unconvincing " he said peevishly. " Not at all," Wrench was in arms for his handiwork ; " it's a good effect—but local, local," he added disappointed, as the snowstorm fell with a flop from the petticoat in which it had been heaped, on to the head of the villain. They evolved the plot as they went, and the result was pleasingly free from the conventions of more pondered productions. No one " dried " ; when the action seemed in danger of lapsing, Jay Lewes ran on in hats. She wore a moustache of smilax. Wrench was rather keen on the show, and made pencil notes. Months afterwards, a less amusing version had a highly successful run at the Diplomatic. He retained its original title, and " Blasted Lives " toured for a year after the town run.

When conviction that the show was over possessed the majority, they danced, raw with giggles, to the gramophone.

Jay Lewes was singularly free from moods, vividly human as she was. Leah found that she could be very silent, preferred it when she flew into comic rages ; humour always lurked in ambush.

On a certain mellow evening when they had

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finished their early supper and were trying not to suggest to each other that it was time to be making a move to the theatre, the electric bell purred, and Jay went out to answer it. On the mat stood a page; his natty little hat bore the name of Maison Cachet.

“Well?” chanted Miss Lewes, and her penetrating voice rang down to the first floor three flights below.

“Oh——Cachay, what? Wait a minute.” She swept into the dining-room and with extreme deliberation disinterred the hat, whistling through her teeth; then, lifting out the model, she raised it to the lights.

“My God,” she said. Leah waited, smiling to herself. Jay obliged at once.

Had she dealt with Cachay for ten years or had she not? Did they think they c’d work off their stickers on her just because she couldn’t spare the time to go rubberin’ around the shop all day? Perhaps they’d like her t’live there for keeps, what?, make up a bed on the floor, huh!

Was it the page’s opinion that this comic-buncho’dump - heapremnantslookedlikeahattthat Jay Lewescouldwalkrightonthestageinwithoutgettinthe cross-eye?

And what did they mean t’do about it in the name o’ caperin’ Mike?”

An’ the cherub page, undismayed, staggered down the stairs, submerged beneath the box on which the headdress balanced. Miss Lewes



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flung herself into a chair and relapsed into thought.

"Have you really dealt at Cachet's for ten years?" It was Leah's way of reminding of the flight of time. The car had been waiting twenty minutes already. Jay, without turning round from her attitude of dejection, mewed up in her head like a kitten.

"Meh," assented Jay sadly.

On hot Sundays they went up the river, and would remain to supper at the West's bungalow, or house-boats owned by the inmates of other theatres round about the Parthenon; but they were often alone, and the passing theatrical craft recognized Jay Lewes and bandied backchat, while Leah lay idle in the stern.

## XX.

WHEN it became apparent to Leah that she was to stay with Jay Lewes for an indefinite period, she wrote in haste to Mrs. Bounce for more clothes; there never seemed to be time to go in person. She grudged every moment spent apart from Jay, although she would sometimes deliberately do penance by absenting herself for lonely walks in Kensington Gardens for the absolution of coming home, and wondering how she would find the other, what she would be

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doing, what she would say as Leah came in? It was such enormous fun to arrange by the waters of the Serpentine that, on her entrance, Jay should be practising a song, and then to find her at her desk writing letters. Leah would come in very quietly, postponing the moment when Jay should look round, and would fall into an orgy of happiness in which the faint, poisonous vapours of her days with Deirdre swirled round her, powerless to harm. There was no dearth with Jay—no pettish, moody jibbing.

“Do you love me, Jay?” She would ask it fearlessly, and, “why ask?” from the latter, as she dropped a powder-puff the size of a pedigree cauliflower, before raising her face to be kissed.

It was on one of these absences that Leah met Deirdre Pope one morning, wandering in a remote corner of the Gardens.

She was full of the facile you-must-come-and-see-me-sometime pleasure at encountering Leah, and the latter stood, passively allowing her hands to be clasped. Deirdre, her volatile attention anchored for the moment on the snag of this chance meeting, was expansive, fulsome. And Leah, walled safely round, as it were, leant her elbows upon the ramparts, and, from a great height and security, conversed. She had no vindictiveness left in her. Of Munday she was too indifferent and too proud to speak, but Deirdre let fall the fact that they had left each

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other ; Munday for another woman, she herself in a temperamental brainstorm. She did not put it like that, but Leah knew enough of her ostentatious abandonments, attitudes on sofas, and alleged neuralgia to guess what had driven the never-too-balanced Munday away ; nor did she feel it encumbent upon herself to display sympathy. In Deirdre's world embarrassments played no part.

Then the careless, uninterested question at last.

"And are you back at Turnham Green? Oh, by the way, I meant to ask you——"

"I'm staying with Jay Lewes," said Leah with measured deliberation. This sinking in, Miss Pope abandoned her previous remarks, and made a fresh start.

"Jay Lewes. Do I know her? Friend of the Bounces? My new poems are coming out this autumn, Leaf—the Poet's Bookshelf man, is taking them on. He thinks——"

A hot fury filled Leah. She had kept remote until this moment.

"Miss Lewes is principal at the Parthenon," she said icily. But Miss Pope was impervious to chills.

"Oh is *that* the woman? She dances doesn't she? I saw her in——"

Leah looked at her helplessly ; dissolved rancour in laughter. The idea was a happy one ; she must tell Jay later.

"Leah darling, we must meet *often*. I'm

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at the Beauregards. They're wonderful. He has a beautiful mind. Now dear don't let us lose each other. You know, friendship is *such* a beautiful thing!" (with a hand clasping Leah's arm.)

Leah shifted. She hated unseasonable "set pieces." Deirdre wasn't a fool, must know she was too late with her blandishments. Leah hoped she would not try to kiss her as they parted, she herself was too courteous to refuse. She contrived to be as evasive as Deirdre in the matter of refusing invitations, and managed to ebb away with a bright, hard smile. Miss Pope was unruffled.

That ghost was laid.

## XXI

THE request for Leah's trunk brought a batch of news in its wake, and Leah, reading, thought it only needed the stimulus of her own absence for things to 'get a move on' in Monk's Green. "If I'd been at home, they'd have spread all this over years. . . ."

Jimmy Bounce was actually married, and more, was taking the flat formerly occupied by Deirdre and herself.

Part of Bessie's letter ran :

*"Now I've made it up with Eustace I'm so happy, I'm sure it must be for the best. It was upsetting me very much. We're to be married*

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*quite soon and you must come back for it. How exciting my dear to be with Miss Jay Lewes! Eustace came in one evening too late for me to ask you for seats and we got in the last row of the pit and saw beautifully and I thought she was sweet. Eustace admired the girl who sang 'Beautiful Baby Ways' more. The dresses are awfully pretty aren't they and you looked awfully nice. We're looking about for rooms as we shall start in a small way and I'd like to be near home."*

Ella wrote on half a sheet of blue paper enclosed in a cream-coloured envelope :

*"Oh Leah Do be an Angle and ask Miss Lewes if I may come round and see her after the show one night and you too of course. She has been so kind to you——"*

Leah put the letter down. How precisely these people contrived to flick you on the raw! And it was all so harmlessly meant. . . .

*" . . . . so kind to you that perhaps she would help me? I can't get anything to do and the house is so dreadfully dull and Bessie's going away and Alice's out all day."*

Poor little wretch! How squarely she hit the nail on the head. Leah admired the directness of the statement of woe. Ella's grievances were at least communicable; she was no soulful vapourer. Leah tried not to notice the extent to which Ella had 'climbed down.' She was evidently 'going through it' at last as the others had done, in their ways; but she might yet short-circuit their experiences by this unscientific hitting. Leah felt a very grandmother to Ella; even to Alice she had always felt as a step-

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mother ('mother' implied too indulgent an attitude).

Her thoughts were broken off by the entrance of Jay, and she nerved herself for a new generosity. Ella trusted her blindly; Leah was at the fount by night and by day! Show the letter itself she would not; the "kind to you" stuck too tightly in her throat.

"Hallo darl'n! Lettr's?"

"Yes. I've just had a regular—look here Jay, you've probably heard me speak of the youngest, Ella."

"Aha," assented Miss Lewes, arranging flowers.

"Well—look here, she wants to come around and see you after the show."

"Well, let h'r," answered the other recklessly, "darn these thorns! She must've got it badly——"

"She's not alone, as you'd say, you Jay-thing!"

—— "if the spectacle of a woman makin' up hur face with hur hair screwed up like the cook excites h'r."

"I——suppose it does seem like that to you. But listen. The worst is yet to come. She's on the stage——or rather off it at the moment——"

"Oh-h!" Jay Lewes spoke in tones of enlightenment, "'begin t'see light at the end 've the tunnel, as our Mr. Dimsdale says. An' what she think I c'n do for h'r, hey?"



## INTERVAL

"Oh, everything, I suppose; they always do." Leah until that minute had thought the same herself.

"Dear heart! I'm not an agent! I know lots 've useful folk, naturally, but even the best've us havn't much real influence that way. I'm only a salaried artist like the rest—but I may be able to do something for h'r."

"You might—get her on at the Parthenon——"

"No," said Jay quietly, "but I'll try an' fix h'r, if only t'please you sweetheart."

After a smiling, gushing, perky little Ella had giggled her way out of Miss Lewes's dressing-room, a place was found for her in the new *révue* at the Diplomatic across the road.

The long, incredible summer was passing, and Leah, whenever she thought of her old home, which was not often, had a presentiment that it was an impossibility that Mimosa Road could be any longer in existence. It was inconceivable that while she waited in the hall for Jay to emerge for a morning with dressmakers, shoemakers, "Cachay," etc., her own old bed-room should be actually there, biding its time, dingily, grimly waiting to reclaim her.

It seemed as if, in common decency, it should have vanished into space now that it had served its turn. . . .

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### XXII

THE autumn drew mistily on, and Leah, as she sat by the fire, put down the book to wonder afresh. She appreciated anew her own ease—here, but to-day she realised her nerves were on edge for Jay's return. Why? Everything was all right . . . she looked at the clock and calculated; only a few minutes now. She put the hands on five minutes, and laughed happily, absurdly. The passion for action moved her to prowl the room. By the window she paused without knowledge. "I shall get broken to it, some day." . . . She moved on. "All this—clock—business . . . and I've been here all the summer. . . . Garth van Osten, if she doesn't come in soon, I shall go and look over the banisters." She put down the photograph; knelt at the fire. "It's autumn already; she'll wear the furs we bought at Josky's. The streets'll be lit when we go to the Parthenon . . . we'll turn on the light in the car . . . and then, Christmas. Do I go back to the Bounces or not? Not if I know it! I may have to go over for the day. Back on Boxing day . . . nineteen—and every sort of a fool there is!"

Over what waste lands she had toiled to Jay! She could wonder now in what way fate was moving those pieces against which she had jostled on the journey. The High School

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girls . . . Leah could not remember a third of the names, that awful little violinist—somebody Turner. She would fiddle her anæmic way into matrimony with some self-improver who read Ruskin and took soda-mints at meals. Rebecca Kingsly, committed to the artistic round, scrapped and replaced . . . what a thousand pities that had been, now she came to think of it ! How fond Leah could have been of her, and what would have been the upshot if Rebecca had been amenable ? Mrs. Clifton. A nice little thing—hopelessly suburban, of course, no strength of character. Leah was sure that at forty-five she would not allow a girl of barely eighteen to boss her affairs ! But then it was more than probable nobody would want to. She hadn't seen Margaret Clifton alone since the tea that had concluded the episode of the bath-room. Mrs. Clifton had dropped calling on her old friend Mrs. Bounce. For the first time Leah felt guilty. Poor Mrs. Bounce had loved her friend with unromantic sincerity. How Leah spoilt things for everybody ! and how she suffered for it. She had scarcely a friend in the world ; Anne Sleath, perhaps, who was public property. And Odara Tyndal, Deirdre Pope—— ! they at least had not conformed, but she had lost them before they were won ; and these were only the outstanding names, but one and all she had put them through the mill, her demands upon them increasing with her growth.

Waste, waste ! . . .

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The front-door slammed, and Leah flashed to her feet. Jay did not come into the room, she let off a hailing "Oy!" from the passage. "Hul-lo!" Leah answered her.

"Oh girl, I've had the hell 've a morn'ing—sorry—hollerin' That Lovin' Rag into a gramophone. Wait while I take m'things off."

The maid came in and gave Miss Lawrence an envelope. It looked out of the ordinary; Leah had not heard a ring or knock. Excited, she tore it open:

*arriving england tuesday tenth with you  
wednesday mother*

First it meant nothing, just a dim, barren place in which she stood alone. It was much later that something seemed to click inside her head. Waves of nervous, almost electric, shocks drowned her, then she grew cold, a damp cold that spread clammily. She sat taut, incredulous, fearful. She hoped she wasn't going to be sick. Her brain, lulled for weeks, responded instantly to the sudden rude demand upon it, fought her for its right to work at the dreary high pressure of the past. It wrenched to begin——

She noticed that the cable, or whatever it was, had been forwarded from Mimosa Road; no time had been lost. Mrs. Bounce had reverence for, and mistrust of, expressed communication. A telegram roused the whole house. . . . So

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this was the meaning of her unease for Jay to return ! It was the bond between them, tugging them together. . . . To-day was Tuesday. Six clear days left—she must be home a day before. Why, they gave the condemned longer notice of death, surely ? Or didn't they ? Perhaps the suspense was worse ? At least this had fallen swiftly. But you can suffer an eternity—in six days.

Of course something had to happen, happiness such as this—had been—was probably unworkable. The devils had been unable to reach her since she found Jay to chase them away, and had fled, shrieking, across the seas to whisper in this intimate-stranger's ear. . . .

Then Jay's voice :

" Leahur ! darn it all where are you ? " She got no answer.

Leah had tried. . . .

But some instinct drew Jay Lewes unerringly to her. She saw the paper at Leah's feet, saw Leah——

" What's that ? " she said, sharply. Picking it from the floor with a " may I read it ? " she did so, many times, and laid it aside. Abruptly she sat down upon the sofa, and put her arms round Leah.

" Now Leahur, take your time," she said quietly, and whistled meditatively through her teeth.

But tears were mile away, biding their time, yielding place to preliminary of flat, small voice.

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“ Well, my mother’s coming home at last,” she managed bitterly.

For once Jay Lewes misunderstood.

“ Well, better late than nev’r h’ny, though it beats me what she was doin’ t’leave you out ’ve h’r life all these years. If Babs had lived, I mightn’t’ve been able to watch out f’r h’r all the time myself, but I’d’ve put h’r where I c’d fetch h’r any moment.

My! I wish my deeur old mother was right here this minute t’give me a hug. She was dead against my comin’ over to England an’ wanted me t’go back to h’r in V’rginia for a spell, but I had too much on my mind then t’care to walk around fancyin’ myself among the t’rnips, an’ when I’d been with h’r a bit she saw it was the best thing. She sent me a photo a year ago. She’s got the most beautiful white hair ever you saw in your life. She used t’make coffee like a dream o’ Paradise. I’ve never beaten it in any restaurant this side.”

Leah, her head on Jay’s shoulder, sat up with a jerk.

“ It isn’t that—but how *dare* she come back—just now? There was many a time with the Bounces . . . even though I shouldn’t recognize her if I met her . . . but *now* . . . it had to be *now*! And she can claim me like a parcel, I suppose; I’m under age, and dependent. As far as I can make out Dad didn’t leave much . . . why she never even thought of



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sending a photo—oh I don't mean she's heartless, she may be for all I care! I've got all that to find out . . . she's just casual. I only wrote her when the cheques came . . . polite stuff . . . what was there to say? I don't know any of her interests. She might have asked me to join her in Australia, but I think she's had rather a struggle, and anyhow it would have meant trailing about after her from place to place . . . and I hate long journeys, and there was the fare. And I wouldn't have gone—since I met you. . . .”

“My dearie, if you find that things are too difficult—later—you come right back t'me an' live. I've got a pretty decent salary an' plenty laid by against the day someone else wipes my eye f'r me.”

“I almost wish you hadn't said that, Jay. I shan't give my mother a fair trial—now. I shall come back. There'll be no getting quit of me.”

“Well, I shan't cry my eyes out. We'll stay on here, an' when I've worked through my contracts, which'll take me about another three years, we'll go on the razzle to New York an' ask Garth van f'r a place in the chorus.”

For the following days Jay Lewes cut out her engagements, astonishing sundry organizers. Leah at first begged her not to, desiring that in the usual rush things might seem to be as in the past. Sweet though the leisure with her was, it underlined the coming break.

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Leah had no intention of giving up her place at the Parthenon, that at least she would cling to, but she pictured the new conditions that would close in upon her at the conclusion of the night's work, and the return to a strange house which in future she must learn, must remember, to call home. She contrasted it with the moments when she and Jay had climbed into the car silent, tired, but on the whole responsive to the mood of the other. But it was more than probable Leah would get her notice at the end of the present run. The management had many irons in the fire and might transfer Miss Lewes to another theatre where she, Leah, could not follow, and Vyvyan West's influence might not extend to new surroundings. She would see Jay often, of course, but she would have no more standing at these visits than any other intimate caller. And—the suburban home with her mother, where, in the long evenings she would be isolated with memories . . . Jay perhaps with new friends? She tortured herself in advance. Perhaps some other girl . . . it had happened once! But Jay wasn't like that . . . but wasn't she? Her kindliness could be very perilous, and the love she was bound to attract she would be very tender with. Leah planned surprise visits to her dressing-room at some other theatre. But these visits would be disjointed affairs at best . . . she would not know exactly what Jay had been doing before Leah entered the room, nor what she would do when

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Leah left it . . . and the agony of seeing the show from the front . . . and another supper on the stage, perhaps ; Jay in another gown of—what ? Leah would live on speculation for the future.

And so the last days traitorously dwindled and vanished.

As Leah entered the drawing-room on the Monday morning, dressed for departure and holding her hand-bag, Jay was staring out of the window. She turned at the step.

“ I sh’ll see you to-night deeur one—an’ f’r a great many ‘to-nights’ too I hope. I sh’ll expect you at the usual time in number 2. Now, deeur, we’re not goin’ t’fret, are we, h’ny ? I sh’ll miss you more’n I can say. It’s been v’ry sweet to me to have you t’look after an’ boss around.” She took Leah’s face in her hands.

“ I’m goin’ t’start right in at once at some new numburs this noon. There’s nothing like work deeur, I’ve found that out in my time. If ever you get the black dog—an’ God knows we all do, times—you take my tip an’ put your back into something, don’t matter what ’tis.”

Leah nodded silently ; she herself had known it ever since her schooldays ; only life had not dealt with her so bravely as it had with Jay.

Jay had been married at Leah’s age, and six years later had lost her little girl, taken a hazardous step without hesitation, made her own successful life, created her own circumstances all

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the time. She had had experiences any one of which most women would have spread over a lifetime. And taken them all in her stride. Any mistakes she might have made had been admitted, dismissed, and——

But Jay was kissing her—many times—and imaginings were put to flight.

So Leah returned for the third time to the house in Mimosa Road.

### XXIII

THE Bounces were full of eager questions and speculations. Ella rhapsodizing over her work and "that peach of a Jay Lewes," Bessie sparing spasmodic intervals from wedding preparations to wonder about Leah's mother, Mrs. Bounce and Alice rather overwhelmed. Poor Mrs. Bounce was really sorry to lose Leah, would miss her and Bessie and Jimmy when she could snatch a second for sentiment. But the spare-room must be got ready for Leah's mother, who was expected to stay a few days while she arranged a home. Leah camped in Jimmy's attic. Bessie's trousseau must be finished, Eustace still catered for, Mr. Bounce bundled out of the way, the rest of the invitations dispatched, the "fork" breakfast ordered, to say nothing of clearing up and the carrying of paper, straw, and packing-cases to the shed in

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the garden in the pauses between more pressing duties.

Supper had been laid an hour later against the possible arrival of Mrs. Lawrence; but time passed and she did not drive up to the door until ten o'clock. Leah, at the theatre, spent the night under the same roof with her mother, who had retired early, without seeing her.

The following morning Leah put on the Nile-green wrapper. After all, Jay had worn it once, or she couldn't have discovered "she looked like the scrub-lady in it, kind o' tired." Leah gathered it close.

Dazed, she reached the spare-room, knocked, entered and hesitated.

Mrs. Lawrence—Stella Lawrence on the concert platform—was in bed reading *The Stage* and smoking. Her hair, like Leah's but darker, new copper with the sun on it, delicately brightened with bronze powder, was fashionably done. She was somewhat over middle-age and in youth must have been beautiful, but time and struggle had etched tired lines upon the face which certainly resembled Leah's. She had the same square, petulant mouth, but her eyes were grey. She was considerably taller and of more massive build. Leah thought what a fine show-girl she might have made. . . .

Her mother looked up brightly, flung down her cigarette, hurled the paper to the foot of the bed, and holding out her arms cried:

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"Why! it's my little kiddy!" and kissed her warmly.

"So you've turned professional?" smiled Stella Lawrence later. Her trained voice was tones deeper than Leah's own. "Well, if you loved the business like I did I don't wonder. Parthenon, eh? That's a musical show house, isn't it? I feel a regular backwoodsman and things seem to have changed in London all these years. When I left England the Parthenon was polite comedy, rehearse-a-month-and-run-a-week kind of thing." She grinned in a friendly way.

The shop gossip was to her daughter a help; nevertheless she wondered how long her mother would allow herself before assuming the parental manner.

"Oh well, it all goes in cycles. You must show me round, darling, and help me get my new theatrical bearings."

Mrs. Lawrence was prevailed upon to stay for Bessie's wedding by the excited Bounces, and, as it was within the next few days, she consented, reserving the humorous, bored shrug for the closing of the door.

And the day of Bessie's wedding. . . .

St. Cuthbert's was too expensive, the decorations would be 'swallowed up,' the friends of the bride and groom rattle like castanets amidst that vastness; so the ceremony took place at Eustace's own church, St. Lawrence-at-Grid, where



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the flowers and relations made a better show. Leah hated the whole business for which she felt virtually responsible, but attendance was imperative.

Led by a pattering sidesman, whose boots creaked with cheerful irreverence upon the flagstones, she and her mother were conducted past much-to-be-desired back rows, until it seemed they would end in being offered a seat upon the altar itself ; but with a final ushering squeak of indication, the boots stood aside and allowed them to enter a pew third from the choir. This also meant that a sickeningly stiff neck was incurred by the constant necessity to scrutinize the assemblage emerging in twos and threes from the red baize hangings patterned with fat black fleurs de lys at the entrance. People Leah did not remember had an unnerving habit of gently leaning over her pew and prodding her in the back, smiling and talking subdued, but far too loud for all that, in a place where tradition has decreed that to be natural is to be disrespectful. Friends and relations of the Bounces, these, dutifully claiming recognition, seeing in a wedding the only means of bridging the silence of years, and from it dispersing—who knows where? Leah did not attempt to sort them out.

And then Mrs. Bounce, conventionally tearful in grey, Ella obstreperous in a ruched chiffon hat through which gleamed her golden hair, and Alice in a hideous duck's-egg serge, filed into their places, followed a little later by Jimmy's

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wife, neat and quiet in a dark suit, while Jimmy himself teeter'd unhappily near the vestry door. He was trying to recollect the "business." Then came the first embellishment of the pageant of indecent suggestiveness that would presently unfold, in the form of a clack from the organ-loft, and the mosquito-like chord of the voluntary, so thin, so clarified, it seemed a singing in the listener's own ears. Pianissimo, it gave the performer plenty of scope for a stop he particularly favoured, which produced an effect of a shimmer of heat on an unbearable August afternoon ; a stuffy vibrato which seemed to obscure the altar in a throbbing mist. When he had decided the church was now warmed through, he loosed a rakish little tune, strangely mundane. "I believe it's Our Miss Gibbs," muttered Stella Lawrence in her daughter's ear. But with adroitness it saved its reputation by a ramble into something still gay, but unmistakably 'classical,' before returning to the musical-comedy motif which closed the performance.

In the whispering interval, Leah leaned back and thought out the situation.

Strange, oh *strange*, that Bessie would in a few minutes emerge to take a leading part, to witness which an audience had assembled from their unguessed homes and interests. This, Leah supposed, was her Day Of Triumph, but it also seemed to her that Bessie wasn't getting a run for her money. One day on show, queen of the ceremonies, and all the rest of her life at

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the gas-stove, cooking . . . and she couldn't cook either ; she was neither useful nor ornamental ! How did this sort of girl manage ? Bessie, until the proposal, had muddled along trying to have a good time, as understood by the Monk's Green girls. She had no system of life, was laying up nothing for the lean years. It was the reckless policy of a former generation that banked on marriage. But, unlike the figures of that deliberately picturesque epoch, she had never dreamed of "making herself useful in the house," of learning the housewife's craft. Nor did Mrs. Bounce seem to expect it. Why, she couldn't even be trusted to boil an egg without forgetting it and leaving it to be spooned out by one of the others. It always ended in Bessie placidly waiting for her food to be given her. What a house run by her alone would be like was beyond imagination. She would, Leah supposed, have a 'morning woman,' who would take their groceries home, and want food at intervals of half-an-hour or so ; but she would go at lunch time and what was to happen then ? When Bessie had babies, Leah guessed that their care would inevitably devolve upon Mrs. Bounce, while Bessie hung about in the background looking vacant. It was a good thing there was only one way of producing babies ; otherwise she would have muddled that, or that more than one a year—if you discounted twins—was impossible ; if not, she would have gone the limit in a lethargy of helplessness.

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Leah and Ella, the latter because she thought Eustace a fool, the former because it was principle, had pounced on Bessie weeks ago urging her to omit certain portions of the service, and of course Bessie had caved in when it came to the point. It was surely impossible that she should not have considered these matters for herself, for in spite of her law-abiding front, the more obvious war-cries of the Suffrage days must have, by their constant repetition, found some lodgment in her unretentive brain; but familiarity had apparently bred contempt; they had degenerated into mere political mottoes. Besides . . . principle was all very well, but——your own wedding was a different matter. That was reality, let idealism fit in afterwards where it could. Bessie could not be expected to realise that her views had led to the very suffrage movement itself. . . .

Then a hymn, and the choir followed by Bessie, stubby in the white which had never suited her, but in which Leah supposed she desired to advertise to the world that she was in an undamaged condition——a tit-bit, unshop-soiled, for Eustace to munch at his leisure.

*O Perfect Love!*

Well——! if a man could find Bessie desirable then anything might happen! That any man could wish to make her the mother of his children was inconceivable——worse——ridicu-

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lous. Would Bessie really rear children who would smack their lips at meals ; daughters with thick ankles who would snuffle savagely when their love-affairs went wrong? But perhaps—like couples in novels—they “had not thought of children”? In which case, what about the marriage service which, besides relegating the woman to the position of a prostitute, insisted on very little else? You were——according to the book of the words——either a “remedy against sin,” or a mere breeding machine.

Eustace didn't know what his bride-to-be looked like in the early morning. . . Leah felt someone should have shouted a warning there and then before it was too late. Some remedy against frowsiness for instance . . . but on the other hand, was Eustace any more desirable? It was fairer to be a dowd than a menace ; were there not, of a surety, episodes in his past which made his proximity and union to the figure in white——and all it stood for——a profanation? Leah wondered, even as the service began, exactly where and when these affairs had taken place . . . and what the night-bird accomplice was doing at the precise moment the couple were kneeling at the altar. . . Some combined room off the Tottenham Court Road . . . scent . . . “leave the money on the mantelpiece”. . . Poor soul ! To be forced to take Eustace, even for an hour, for the few shillings he represented . . . but even now Bessie had pledged herself in an unpleasantly similar capacity . . . for her whole



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life, and in a voice so low it seemed to render the vow illegal. Leah wished, with professional impatience, that brides would speak their 'lines' better; if you had made up your mind to take the part then for God's sake let the audience hear you! But perhaps all the brides who had ever modestly mumbled since the world began, had confused glimpses of the unreticent broadness of their rôle. The service, like some of the lesser-known of Shakespeare's plays—Titus and Pericles for example—needed drastic cuts.

Then there was a pause during which, the principals being in the vestry, no one made idiotic and unpractical vows. After which, the last straw, the wedding march, as they emerged. Bessie with veil thrown back. Respectable at last!

Leah liked the march, looking upon it as comic-relief, especially the yapping prelude which led to the tow-row theme, and that peculiarly harsh but effective chord that is the first in the actual melody. Thus :

Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-tar

(*with menace*) Ta-ta-ta-Tar-ta-ta-ta-tar

(*with growing malignance*)

Ta-ta-ta- tar-ta-ta-ta

Or—rrr——wank!

Wah! te tum tum tum tum

Twiddle (*ad lib.*) um tum te tum

tiddle Iddle Iddle — — —

Or—rrr——wank!

and so on, before relapsing sulkily into the less flamboyant "padding."



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The vicar's little extempore address contained, with other gems, the statement that the couple had "preferred each other out of the whole world." But these matters must be glossed over, as is announced the indisposition of the leading-lady, when she has had a smashing set-to with the management and has threatened to throw up her part for keeps.

And so Bessie was made Mrs. Burrowes, and went for a week to Bognor.

Then Leah's mother, jibbing openly, transferred herself and daughter to a London hotel. The caravanserai atmosphere was the one in which she felt most at home. She secured a tiny suite ; two bedrooms, to Leah's unbounded thankfulness, a bath-room and courtesy drawing-room. Meals were taken in the restaurant below.

Mrs. Lawrence had a piano installed, a concert grand which ate space to such a degree that they, as it were, lived "round" it, and seated at the gleaming mammoth, she would practice with all the professional's thoroughness and detail. She spent the whole of one morning over a shake in the Jewel Song, and Leah, listening with genuine pleasure and increasing respect, remembered her own performance in the Town Hall, an eternity ago, and let her sense of humour gain the upper hand.

While Leah was at her *matinée* Mrs. Lawrence, amusedly recognizing the necessity, paid a call upon Mrs. Bounce. When she realised

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how little they had in common, how conversation came either uneasy, or in a steady flow of banalities, her heart melted with pitying horror for her daughter. Leah had lived with this for years, her mother was chafing at one tea-party! She would have to discover, in the months to come, to what extent her daughter had survived her environment. From what she had seen of Leah it had seemed to be "all right," but subtle affiliations might have percolated through the inevitable outward signs of breeding? Being a Bohemian, this possibility only troubled Stella Lawrence intermittently.

What a muddle she had created for the poor child! She had been the means of placing her beyond every pale. She swore to herself that she would make it up to Leah later, and wondered how it was to be done; she herself had her own circle to create in London which would take precious time. Of course Leah was still 'quite young'; possibly she had struck out a line for herself? She dragged her mind back to the disposal of her hostess.

Mrs. Bounce clung to the one straw in sight after they had variously disposed of Leah and gratitude as topics. She spoke of her sister-in-law, Ethel Brail "that was." Ethel had permitted America to absorb her; one flying visit to England years ago, and then back to wed a prosperous rancher who took her to Canada.

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Doing the work of a man—and a woman—she seldom wrote home.

Mrs. Lawrence was unaccountably relieved. . .

And then one evening as Leah hurriedly prepared for the theatre, Stella Lawrence, at a loose-end, suggested coming too. "I'll drop in and see the show and come round and fetch you afterwards."

## XXIV

WITH breathless impatience Leah had fled to the Parthenon on the evening of the day she first saw her mother. Once there, the routine caught her up, and it seemed as if this new disturbance had never happened. And Jay, knowing some type of storm was in store for her, firmly shoo'd even Alice out of the room.

"Well pet, an' what's the worst with you?" she had whispered, her arms about Leah.

"It mayn't be so bad. She seems quite jolly and talks shop with the best, and oh my Lewes woman! to see us together! It's like an orange and a lemon!" Then the call-boy came bothering, and Miss Lewes, intensely relieved on Leah's account, began to wail for the dresser.

"Oh Alus, Alus, Alus, whayur art thou!"

Leah, bewildered with the effort to splice the new life to the old, took her mother to the

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theatre. They passed the front of the house dado'd with photographs, and Stella Lawrence, curious as a schoolgirl, paused.

"Who's that?" she asked quickly, pointing to studio studies of Jay Lewes, in the French Revolution *chapeau-bras*, getting out of the car, arm-in-arm with Dimsdale and Allan, and, best of all, Jay asleep in a crinkled gown of flowered pattern, with cigarette hanging from drooping fingers to the tiger-skin rug.

"That's Jay Lewes," Leah quietly added, "she's one of the principals."

"Oh yes?" indifferently, "of course I've heard of her."

At the conclusion of the show Stella Lawrence lost herself among the passages, having impetuously come in to investigate. Anderson, that conscientious, authoritative, and sometimes rude, old man, was absent on some errand.

Leah, turning from dreams to reality as she closed the door of number 2, was confronted with her mother, looking very handsome in powder blue, black fox, and a black velvet tam o' shanter under which her tinted coppery hair gleamed in the light from the electric under its cone of wire. Then——

"Oh, Leahur, have you gone? Just a moment——" from behind the closed door. Leah was in a quandary. She had not thought it necessary to speak of Jay, but she guessed that an introduction must some time be made. Jay would want to meet her and form her own

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opinions. She opened the door at once. Jay wanted her !

"Yes dear, I'm still here, and, oh Jay, er—mother has come for me and I'm sure she'd love to meet you. May she come in?"

"Why sure thing." Jay Lewes rose. "How do you do, Mrs. Lawrence; come right in——"

"*Jasmine!!*"

"*Dinkie!!*"

Leah saw her mother's arms round Jay's neck. . . . Averting her eyes, she closed the door very quietly and went down the passage.

And in number 2, two women were seeking reasons in words that refused to come quick enough, scanning each other for landmarks and unfamiliarities, beginning scraps of news that escaped and were merged in exclamations of astonishment and joy, and stopping to hug each other when they abandoned the attempt to exchange the experiences of over twenty years.

"Well Dinkie-duck I guess you worked a surprise on me. What decided you t'come back aft'r all this?"

"Homesickness, my agent, and——providence, Jas-mine."

"An' now——try an' tell me what happened after Babs died. I felt it terribly, the way we lost each other, Dinkie." Mrs. Lawrence threw off her fur, her face troubled.

"After I left you I was about at the end of

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my tether. I'd hardly a penny saved—by the way I still owe you ten dollars!—and then I met Austen Lawrence, and we were awfully in love, and I was so thankful . . . it would have been too awful to have—y'know—married for a home. He hadn't much, but we got married as soon as ever we could, and when I felt safe, I moved heaven and earth to find you. Never dreamed I shouldn't . . . tried to remember your mother's address and couldn't, and . . . well it was rather like trying to find a needle in a haystack, and you were a very small needle in those days . . . we both were, God knows! And all the time you were skirmishing around in England under another name—two other names. You did the thing thoroughly, dearest."

"But you might've gone to Oylurrm'n, not that he knew my address in Europe—I didn't myself, but he might've put you on my track. I had letters of——"

"But my darling"—with a hint of impatience——"how could I have known you'd go back to him and fix up about coming over here? I naturally thought you'd cut loose from him for good when—you had to leave. Besides, there was a bit of a frost on between us after I chucked the show like that. I should've been scared of my life to go near the place again! You see, I was absolutely floored about everything—myself particularly—and when Garth—bless him and the management that released him!—came back from tour to be with you, I went back to my old



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room with the Brail girl. Oh my dear ! there was no place for me in the world ! . . . I knew he had the first claim, and I was truly happy for your sake, but—oh well, it was the last straw somehow. I can't expect you to understand. ."

" But I do dearie, I do. You always thought a sight too much've me."

" I stuck to the boarding-house a few weeks, and then I couldn't keep away any more ; I guessed Garth would have gone again. And oh Jas ! to find the flat empty !"

" I'd gone to my mother's."

" I was just stunned. I leant against the door . . . then I went to the house agent. He said you were still there. I said you'd gone away, everything was shut up. He wasn't interested. Just said you were still a tenant, and he didn't know where you'd gone——"

" I was, only I hadn't made my plans then ; didn't know I was goin' to Europe."

" I asked for Garth's address. No result. Then I went back——somehow——to that dog-gasted boarding-house and cried. That girl played up like a trump, and I'd been so beastly to her sometimes——"

" An' then ?"

" I wrote to Garth——"

" That's right h'ny ! always get the wife out o' the way first !"

" I also asked him for Mrs. Shelley's address, but he can't have got the letter ; they must have altered one of the tour dates. Well anyway,

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that just about finished me. And it was all I could do to bring myself to write him at all. The outsider I felt! . . . then Austen heard me sing one night at a café—oh I had to do something, I was nearly on the rocks—and apparently that did the trick! It seemed he'd once done business with my father in England——” Jay Lewes laughed.

“How's your father, what!”

“I know! but he really had, and he “took care” of me like an old dragon wherever I was dated to sing. Took care! Poor innocent!”

“But go on, go on.”

“We got married, and when the kid was three, he died . . . got inflammation of the lungs, and I was pretty busy looking after him and keeping an eye on the child. I was always frightfully ambitious . . . we both were, you and I Jas, only I used to talk about it and you didn't, and I made up my mind that cross my heart I'd get there as a singer. . . . I think I'd've done the same anyhow even if I hadn't been left so badly off. Stinny was an architect, y'know, but there didn't seem to be much money in his work. He was rather unpractical—too high-brow, wouldn't take pot-boilers. I'd rather lost touch with the relations in England, never knew any of 'em, and left for America under a cloud of frumpish displeasure because of the stage business. Even when I was hardest up I wasn't sorry I'd cut 'em out. Because of them I told Ethel not to let on to the Bounces what

## INTERVAL

my maiden name was ; I didn't want it to get round ; I don't see quite how it could have, but you never know with relations. They always nose you out to gossip over, and they wouldn't have been any help. Ethel just fobbed me off as Mrs. Lawrence. So I did pretty much what you did, I got a friend to loan me our fares and we went second class to Australia and lived just anyhow for the first months, and I took any old job that came along ; that meant vamoosing about all over the shop of course, and after six months of lugging the kid about, I found I simply couldn't do it. If I was ever to do anything, I just had to be free. . . . I worked under my married name because if I'd stuck to the Miss Mary Conder business (d'you remember the girls used to call me Anna Conder?) everyone would have thought I'd had a—misunderstanding!! So when she was four, I packed off the poor little brute——”

“ To England.”

“ Well, I was half dead with worry wondering who on earth to send her to and then—you remember the Bounce girl in the Beauty Parlour crowd in New York?”

“ No.”

“ *Woman*!! she is the girl I lived with ; I've been telling you about her. Oh my good story!”

“ But Bounce is the folk——”

“ Yes I know, wait, wait! I *will* get mine in first! Well, d'you remember a girl called Brail then?”

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"No, I'm darned 'f I do."

"Well, her real name was Bounce. *Now* d'you see?"

"Oh dear heart! what *is* all this about?"

"Listen, *listen!* To cut a dull story short, I palled up with the poor kid. She thought she was a woman of the world, but she was as green as an apple really, and we pigged it together—oh you *do* remember Jas!"

"M'na. I begin to arrive. Little yellow-haired thing rather like our Mrs. Oylurrm'n?"

"*That's* better! She told me one day that her brother in England was married and had a nice wife and two children—and I suppose it was a crazy thing to do and an awful risk to take, but I was all in with nerves and worry, and I wrote to Ethel—she gave me her p.a. in England, by a blessed fluke—and asked her bang out if she thought her brother's wife would take Leah to live as a "family-boarder." Weeks of delay; the little fiend was in America still, and the relations had to forward the letter. Y'know I was just on the rack she might've forgotten me, but for God's own wonder she hadn't, and wrote a really decent letter (spelt all anyhow) saying how grateful she would always be to me for all I'd done for her in New York, and enclosing a note from her sister-in-law which clinched the matter. She seemed a kind old thing . . . you could just *see* her from the things she didn't say—I mean f'r instance, she didn't breathe the word money in that first letter, and only very

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reluctantly later . . . that class always thinks money matters low. It was all I could do to bring her back to the point. Luckily I had a pal on board going over in some crowd who'd have seen the kid through if there'd been any hitch. So now here I am! and here you are! The former slightly battered and dressed far too young and very annoyed at possessing a grown-up daughter, and the latter, the nicest woman in the wide, looking just a great kid, with no encumbrances except a husband—by the way, where is he?"

"Same old city. He's the big noise over there."

"Steel? Copper? They all leave the stage when they come to!"

"Garth didn't. It bit him good an' hard."

"I know he was beginning to do good work when——"

"Yes, he's a pushin' young particle. Y'know, I can't keep up with all the things you don't seem to know! I suppose we shall get sorted in time. He's van Osten an' Kellinger."

"Wha-a-a-t!! *The* van Osten and Kellinger?"

"Aha. He always had his eye on management, but it hasn't turned his head one bit. I saw to that!"

"My——God. If I'd known I'd've been on to him like a knife——"

"Shame; he could've placed you. There's plenty of time f'r that, he's always on at me t'go

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ov'r, but I've got good an' tangled up in contracts here. I love England. I've got my flat as I like it, an' I like push'n the furniture around an mess'n about . . . well, love, you've had a big lot t'be thankful for. An' what did you think've the Bounce lot?"

"Oh my dear! My heart failed me when I saw them first! Dears, but common, common. Mother almost drops her aitches when excited, and father quite does. The girls have come out of it wonderfully—considering. I havn't seen the boy yet—he's married if you please, Alice is a good ham—slaves for a pittance—Bessie's a nonentity, and the youngest has sold herself into slavery."

"Wh'd'you mean! Married?"

"Oh no my dear, the stage. A far more insidious bondage. It holds the affections longer; she's playing over the road."

"M'yeh. I got her on there."

"My God, what a vicious circle!" Then suddenly, "but why Jay Lewes in the name of commonsense?"

"Darlin' fool, once my name was Jasmine. Get that?"

"Oh-h. But Lewes?"

"My mother's name before she married."

"Lud! what a shuffle."

"An' what you doin' now, voice I mean?"

"Oh, I've got a few odd dates at receptions, but I mean to give a series of recitals at the Vocalion Hall later; thank goodness I can afford



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these little money-dropping amusements now. And later on I may set up a studio and teach. I'm pretty good, y'know."

"You always were."

"By the way Jay, I was in front to-night."

"An' you didn't recognize me go on say so!"

"Well, that's rather a poser to answer off-hand. I——my mind wasn't prepared for the possibility, and then the name helped to throw me off the scent. You see Jas, you've changed your line so—by the way it suits you exactly. You see you never had a real chance up to when we lost sight of each other, but even in those days I saw glimpses that night you guy'd your own number—bless you!—and the other time you guy'd Aubrey Provost. But your old mannerisms have matured, and you're broader than you were——"

"Jokes or person!"

"Donkey! person of course; over nineteen years you know! And you do your hair differently. I like those flat pieces over the ears."

"Spirit-gum an' prayer——"

"Of course when you sang—well I just clutched the stall and glared . . . but I thought it was too good to be true . . . and then, when I saw you close to here without the make-up, I knew at once . . . one doesn't get many moments like that in one's life!" Abruptly she broke the silence that had fallen,

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while she sat, Jay's hand in hers. "And do you think me changed?" . . .

"More'n I have," answered Jay Lewes, honestly; "you're the type that shows wear'n tear, you pretty ones."

"Too true! You were always more—what?—balanced, assured; but then, private affairs apart, you havn't had the struggle I have. I had to think for two, you see, and I'm not the domesticated sort as you know. I had to barter ambition for a livelihood for years, while you forged over to Europe and made good in—how long did it take you, by the way?"

"A few years to practice my line an' a few more t'get the English broken to it, an' after that say two years t'climb t'my present position. There's one thing, once I'd got there I knew I c'd hold on . . . but I couldn't do it again! There's too many from the other side at my job now."

"Yes, but there's only one Jay Lewes, I should imagine. The audience really loves you, it's not a figure of speech; it's not schoolgirls either, or even men, it's—everybody. I heard a woman of about a hundred say she hated "these kind of shows" usually, but she'd seen this one nine times, and meant to see it nine time more! And the old gaffer she was with said that if ever you were off, he'd rather lose the money than go in. One of them was really upset because she couldn't catch a 'Tinkle Peter' doll when you threw them. And there were three girls and

## INTERVAL

a nice boy in the front row of the stalls, and when you came on, they all solemnly clutched each other ! ”

“ Oh Mike ! ”

“ It’s the *genuineness* of you ; you can’t deceive an audience that’s worth its salt. Genius ‘ doesn’t get there in the way you do, and I suppose you’re hardly that. . . . You *have* come along since the old days ! I s’pose you’re making a pretty good thing out of it ? ”

“ Hah ! Well, I c’n pay m’rent—which reminds me ; what price a little holiday somewhere to celebrate, huh ? This show’s runnin’ a bit thin in spite o’ people clutchin’ each oth’r in the stalls. It’ll only have t’be a week or ten days though, they won’t spare me f’r longer or the box offus’ll go down with a run, said she knowing her own value.”

“ South of France ? ”

“ That’s me.”

“ I’ll get the Bounces to take Leah until I get back,” said Stella Lawrence happily.

Jay Lewes started up, her face shadowed.

“ Leahur, where’s Le——,” she went swiftly to the door but the passage was empty, and she returned to her chair. “ God ! how could I——how hateful one c’n be . . . an’ it was all seein’ you Dink’.”

They smiled. Stella said :

“ By the way, I meant to ask you ; you two seem to be on terms. Made a hit in that quarter, eh ? ” She lit a cigarette from the box on the

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dressing-table. Jay Lewes removed it, and taking the other's hands she said bluntly : " Dinkie, I love that Leahur o' yours' an' she loves me too. I noticed her first thing at rehearsal one morning, she reminded me a mite of you. Then she happened along with a note here one night, an', oh well—I d'no. I had her with me right through the summur an' would've kept her longer, only you butted in." She pulled a strand of coppery hair. " Faked ! an' it used t'be so pretty. Lighter too." She glanced at the clock, " my God ! nearly midnight, we'll be locked in f'r keeps 'f I don't get a move on me."

" I'm coming home with you to-night of course ; you'll have to doll me up in some things."

Miss Lewes, hatted and furred, turned.

" My dearest, you're goin' back home to Leahur," she said with decision.

## XXV

WHEN Leah shut herself out she went mechanically down the stairs without an idea in her brain ; only force of habit guided her to the stage door.

Was the show over or had she just come in ? She wished she could meet someone to ask . . .

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was that Fairy Dillon calling out good-night? . . . what a nuisance Monk's Green was so far off . . . but there was some hotel? . . . and would Jay be long to-night? How cosy it would be in the car . . . then *why* hadn't she gone home in it last night? She remembered walking . . . no, she couldn't have walked . . . Monk's Green was by Underground . . . how funny the stairs smelt! sort of cold pipe-clay-ey. "Give me a kiss, little girl"—no, that was the other show——. Of course they couldn't stay quiet with people hurrying up and down them all night, that was why they went up and down like sponges when you walked on them . . . they bounced . . . Mrs. Bounce . . . Ella Bounce. . . .

She must hurry, or they'd be getting anxious.

And so back to Monk's Green for the last time. . . .

Leah Lawrence dressed for breakfast; she felt collected, cold, and curious. In one evening she had recoiled to the old outlooks, temperamentally she was where she started. In one evening! Rather in the seconds between the entrance of her mother and Jay's exclamation——. But mingled with these sensations was another of apology to Mrs. Lawrence for the anxious night she supposed she must have given her. . . . .

Mrs. Bounce had admitted her last night, summoned from sleep by the intermittent ham-

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mering at the front-door. Leah's latchkey had been given back on her departure from Mimosa Road. She received a severe shock on seeing Leah, coupled with her curious vague manner. But Mrs. Bounce, accepting the duty of crisis-coping, had, sensing something wrong, asked no questions. It was too late by that time to set any enquiries on foot; she was only thankful that she, of the now depleted family, had heard the knocking.

Curious to be at breakfast with them again; more curious ever to have been away! Mrs. Bounce had hurried about to various bedroom doors telling the family not to ask questions, and that Leah was back again.

When the meal was over, Leah rushed off to town to the hotel, there to present her duty and make what excuses she could. Would her mother hysterically embrace her, scolding and crying in the same breath, or would she unmask her batteries in a good rousing tirade? Of the two alternatives the latter was almost to be preferred.

She knocked at the door.

"Come in," sang out Stella Lawrence, who was reading in bed. "Hullo child! Breakfast's coming up in a minute. I was so dog-tired this morning I overslept. 'Hope I didn't disturb you coming in last night." Then seeing Leah's coat and hat: "why you *are* an early riser! where you going at this unearthly hour?"

Well, any answer would do for that. The



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chief thing was that the explanation—however she would have contrived to word it—now need not be made.

Leah chipped an egg ; she must eat or the whole business would be to do again ; but even this realisation drew down her mother's cheerful comments. Still you may be off your food without necessarily implying the suppression of any awkward truth.

So Stella Lawrence ate with hearty young zest, unusually pretty for sheer happiness, while her daughter played wearily with her food, looking white and worn, almost ugly, her eyes like black pits, her lustreless hair harsh and staring.

" I don't believe you know about my great pal, dear," her mother began, when she had had her fill and was embarked on a cigarette. " Isn't it strange it should have been Jay Lewes all the time and me not knowing it ! We were in the same show in New York years ago, before I married. She's not altered much ; she was always the tall bossy kind, bless her, and she's turned from a jolly girl into a beautiful jolly woman. Well, perhaps not beautiful, but——"

[ " But," quite so. ]

" By the way, kiddy dear, I hope you won't feel bored all on your lonesome, but she and I are going away for a little holiday to Monte. You'll have your work at night, and matinées, and I'm sure Mrs. Bounce'll be delighted to have you for the ten days we'll be gone. Nasty

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girl! You havn't kissed me *once* yet!" And when Leah had gone :

"Home again, nice daughter, good dates and shall get better, and Jas and Monte together!! Oh! I'm so happy I could scream," said Stella Lawrence.

Leah remained with the Bounces from that morning on; she would do fate out of the pleasure of reserving for her any more invertebrate returns to Mimosa Road. She had had enough of anti-climax; these perpetual farewells and returns were beginning to become ridiculous. . .

She was wrapped in a web of misery; unceasing she asked herself why she shouldn't have guessed that her resemblance to that joy-dispeller, of whom Jay Lewes so often spoke, should not have warned her that—being Leah Lawrence—it had to be her own mother? She had been extraordinarily obtuse. This was the natural dénouement she would have foreseen in the case of another; this denseness was interesting; it was alien to her nature. Whoever arranges these things has a pretty humour.

She was driven in upon herself again. That man in the Town Hall . . . he had opened up a new heaven and a new earth—which was more to the point—for the Bounce girls and herself. She repeated, as she might a charm, some of his amazing statements. They didn't seem to apply to this situation. Religion, call it by any label you choose to affix to it, is all very well when

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your affairs are prospering, but in time of trouble it must give place. That was it. And in any case, recent events gave it the lie.

Then she grew really frightened. If this failed you, then would any other philosophy of life, and, if the ultimate hope was withdrawn, what then? "*Find out where your short-circuit lies.*" Her fault then, oh anything! But that admitted, it didn't seem to melt the heart of whatever power directed the machinery of spiritual help. She felt like an animal punished for an unconscious offence . . . perhaps the key to the situation lay in self-abasement? A list of your sins? Leah "knew all hers," but willingly proceeded to take stock of them anew.

Oh to plunge into some fire from which you might emerge renewed, and renewed, moreover, in the eyes of your friends who never forget; a blank surface upon which to inscribe desires—a kind of spiritual shopping-list. . . .

The tearless phase of indifference came. She prayed she might not be taken off her guard; that no softness or sudden word might melt her.

"*It doesn't matter.*"

She was almost jocular, "tut tut! what have we here? A schoolgirl with the blues——!"

In a little while she believed that she had climbed to these heights where human affections can no longer vex.

She had no chance, thrown into such close proximity with the core of the trouble—her mother. The long absence of Stella Lawrence

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had created a gulf between them that would take years of mutual tolerance to bridge, apart from the Jay Lewes affair. Her mother couldn't have it all her own way ; her beloved friend and her daughter's spineless acceptance and dutiful affection ! Something had to go to the wall. Then there was the question of Jay Lewes' own feelings. What she felt about it Leah did not attempt or desire to know.

They were to start for France on Saturday afternoon. The management had been amenable in permitting its leading-lady thus jaggedly to conclude the week.

Leah found, as she expected, that her attitude at the theatre required elaborate thought. Suffering must wait ; meanwhile there was the matter of immediate social tactics. She had imagined it would not be difficult ; a campaign that should strike a medium between pettish avoidance, and the—she saw it like that—forever departed intimacies. She pictured herself the inharmonious, but always polite, third in the dressing-room, tactfully effacing herself when her mother's grey eye turned in appeal.

But the suffering would not be postponed, and descended in its primeval fashion the moment she entered the theatre for the first time under the new conditions. Her plan of action fell definitely. Torn this way and that, Leah succumbed to instinct, the passionate desire to hit back—vindictively. . . .

At the time that she usually crouched in Jay's

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arm-chair she stayed upstairs, parrying inevitable questions.

"Hul-lo Lawrence! Had a row with J.L. at last?"

And Jay Lewes, after waiting and wondering, in between the endless trifles wanting immediate attention, told off Alice to go up to number 12, ask for Miss Lawrence and tell her she was wanted downstairs.

"Don't bring me into it; give h'r the message on the quiet, y'understand? or—wait. Just say somebody's downstairs——"

Alice, dimly affronted, obediently lumbered off, knowing herself to be beyond diplomacy.

But Leah was on the watch. Panting, Alice ascended the last flight as she slipped into an angle of the passage, shivering in her brief costume and crêpe kimono. After a sufficiently judged interval Leah went back to number 12.

"Someone wants you downstairs. Lewes's dresser came up a minute ago——"

So it was that. Her mother was in Jay's room and, conscience faintly aroused, had done the Kind Thing by Leah. Perhaps Jay too was determined to be kind. . . .

Downstairs Alice was informing Miss Lewes that Miss Lawrence wasn't in the dressing-room and she couldn't think where she could ha' gone, and should she wait a few minutes and go up again? And chance it? Miss Lewes requested her t'go out an' lose herself, and then, being tired, understanding, and having that morning



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received a letter telling her that Garth van Osten's new production was a frost, and he himself vegetating by doctor's orders, she laid her head down anywhere among the make-up, and burst out crying.

But she soon left off and wailed feebly for Alice, as she carefully made good the messy consequences of grief. Alice, very fond of her, knew something of the whimsies of the celebrated, and came at once.

"Alus," said Miss Lewes faintly, "I bin cryin'. I sat down right there with m'face in the powder an' bust out just—where in Mike's my hat?—like a baby. Oh well! Jay b' name an' Jay b'nature I suppose. Yes my boy, I'm comin'."

Of course stray encounters had been inevitable during the few days which elapsed between the management's permission and Miss Lewes' departure. But Leah was prepared for any ordinary contingency, and against the unforeseen she must just use her wits. Only three days more, thank God.

She must manage to get off last in all the ensembles, that the door of number 2 would have had time to shut. She must be in the theatre a little earlier, and lag behind a little later—that was all. Careful! was that all? There was a probable running against Alice to be circumvented, and—oh, damn!—that number that concluded the first half when Miss Lewes at the end of her song stood with the whole company.



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That meant they all got off the stage together, and there would be the moment when Jay turned to speak to her, as she had over a hundred times in the past when the curtain fell. To get her place changed would be impossible now, the grouping had been arranged from the earliest rehearsals; the girls were "matched up." Besides, she would have to ask leave, and to have a chorus girl come begging for the back row——!

Well, she needn't say much. . . .

Jay Lewes, hurt, too large-hearted for a leading-lady mien, did her utmost to catch Leah's eye—even between verses, and turned at the interval to bear her off for a smoke; but almost before the curtain was down Leah had fled upstairs.

The principal could not follow. . . .

## XXVI

THE problem of how to live through the Saturday that her mother and Jay Lewes would leave the country, was solved from without in the form of a last understudy rehearsal scratched together for the girl—late of the small-parts—who was to take Jay Lewes' place at the matinée, and for the whole of the latter's absence.

Miss Patty Connaught, in her confident efforts to make good, assumed what she conceived to be

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an American accent, the conventional twang of which was as opposed to Miss Lewes' tones as flint to cream. Also, Miss Connaught, catching the idea, smiled with perseverance. Untrained in resource, she essayed to copy her model's very inflections—and the wheels creaked all the time. You did not sense humour behind, missed the little interlarded asides, and the sometimes over-unconsciousness of an audience that Jay Lewes brought to the matter ; did not feel that she awaited with difficulty the fall of the curtain that would allow her to rush away to have her laugh out. Had Miss Connaught dared, she would have put out her tongue at the audience did they fail to applaud her sufficiently.

And Leah watched it all. In the greenroom, at the end, she laughed with the tears raining down her face, and her whole being wrung with sobs.

"Lawrence's gone off her nut. 'Expect she's had a row with her boy," said Fairy Dillon.

## XXVII

By the last post that night came to Leah, lying on her bed in the dark, a stiff envelope which was pushed under the door by Mrs. Bounce. Long after, she rose, turned on the light, and tore it open. The smiling head of Jay—a beautiful portrait study—laughed into her eyes. In the

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corner : “ to my little Leah from her old Jay (the Lewes woman !),” and Leah, overcharged, exhausted, saw in it her dismissal.

So she was to take her place among the autograph-hunters ! She had kept the stranger’s place warm in Jay’s heart for close on a year, and now she had come back to claim it.

What next ?

This affair must be the last disillusion . . . nothing could touch her once she was through this. Should she marry Bobby Dainton ? There was fat Bessie safely settled, after a reasonable amount of manœuvring, who would achieve, after a discreet interval, an unappetising baby. Poor devil ! Wise devil ?

“ What next ? . . .

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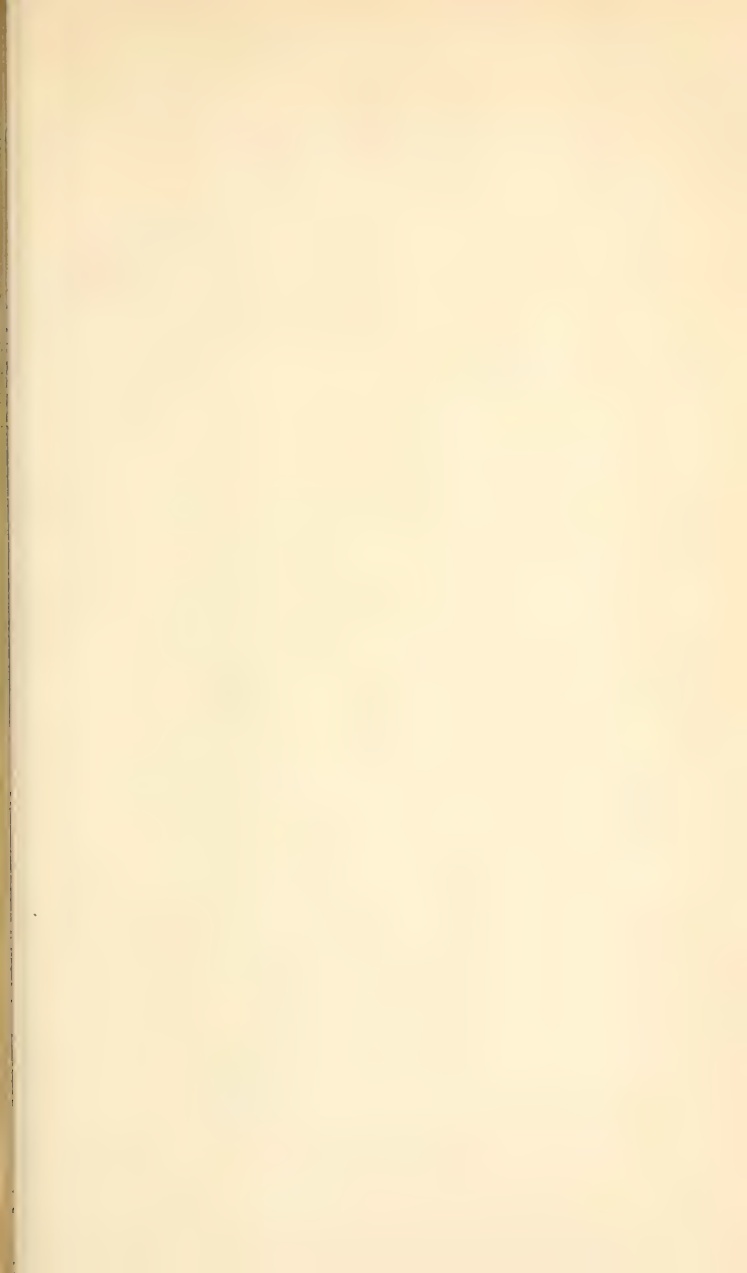
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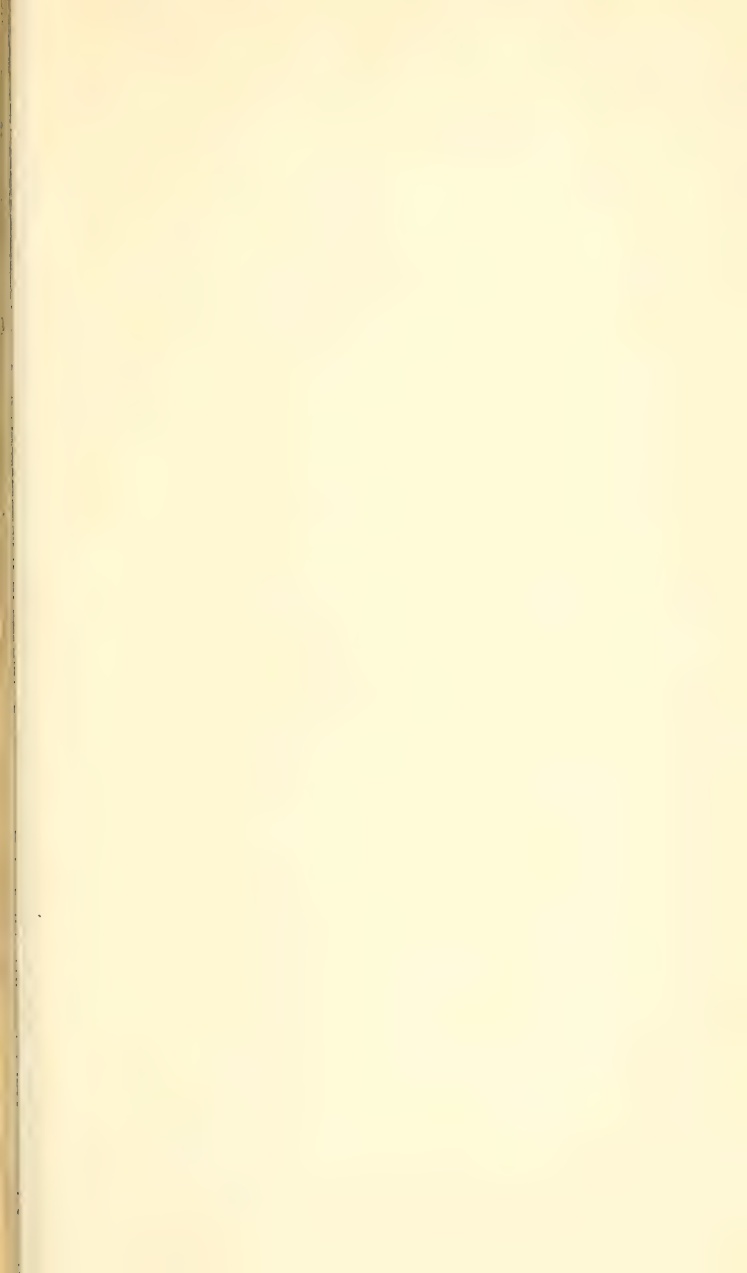
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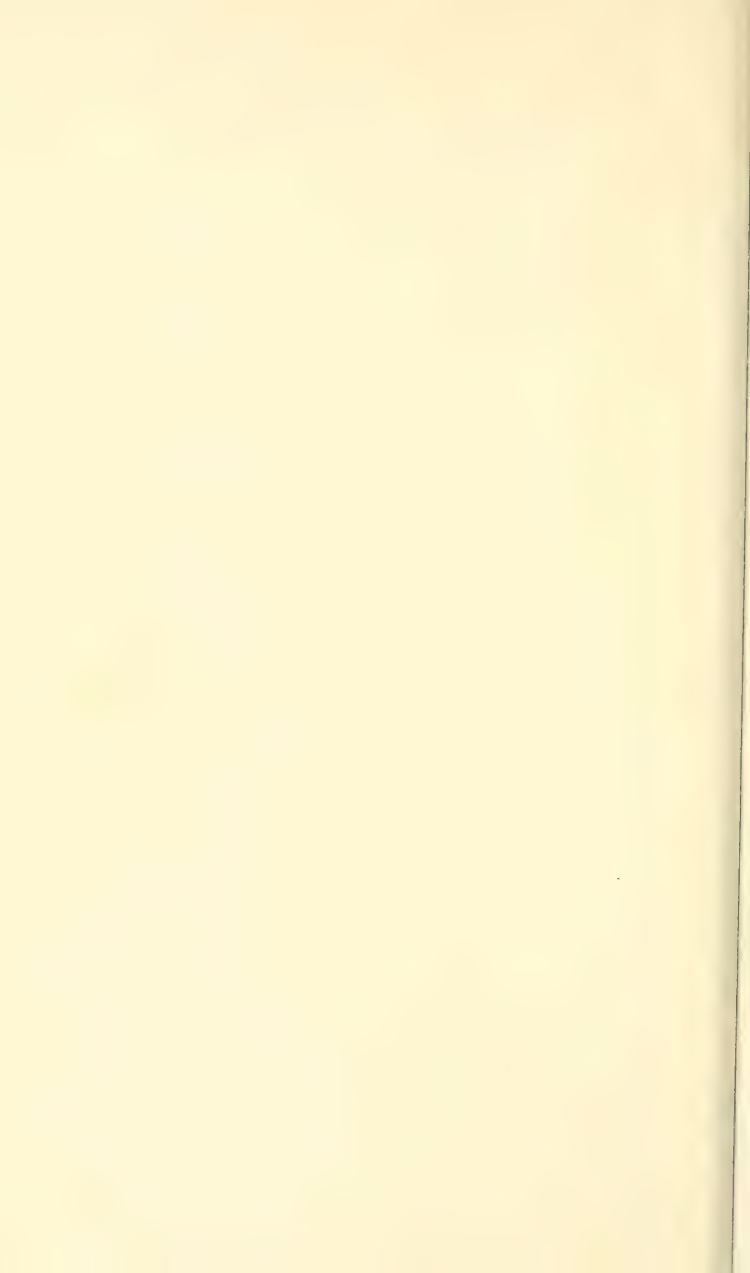
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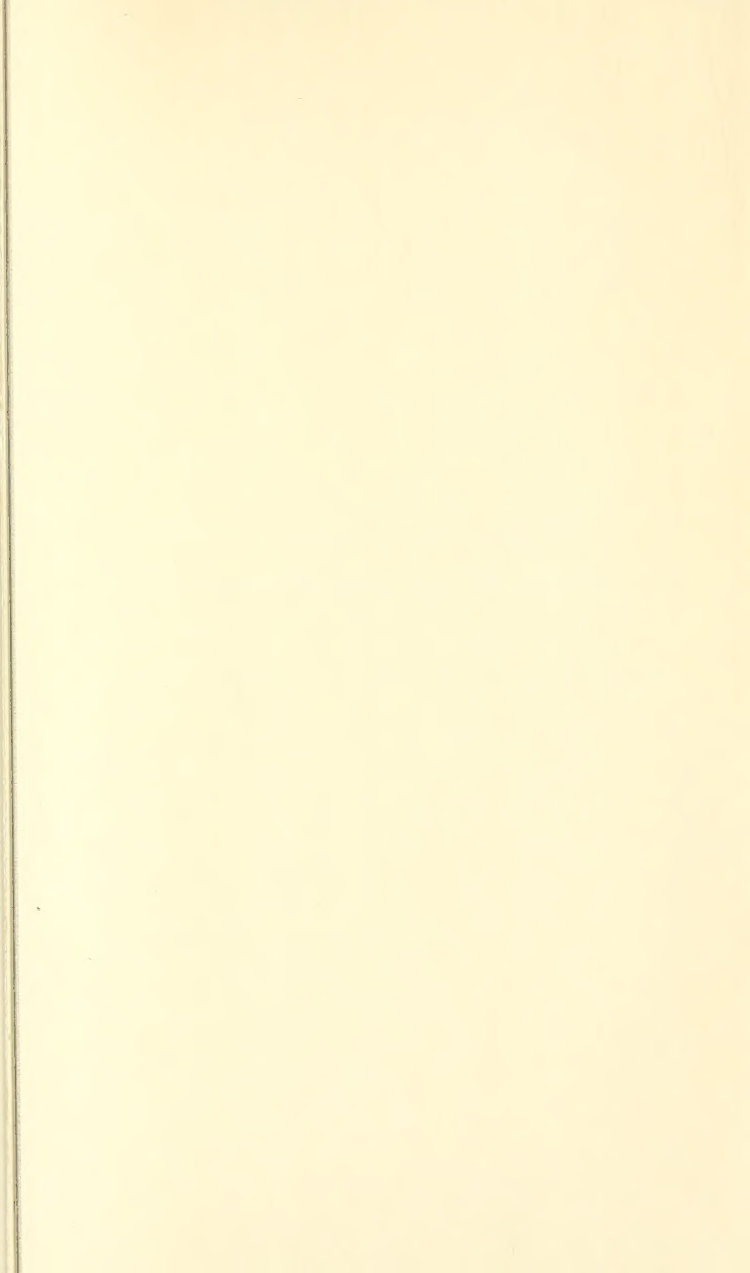


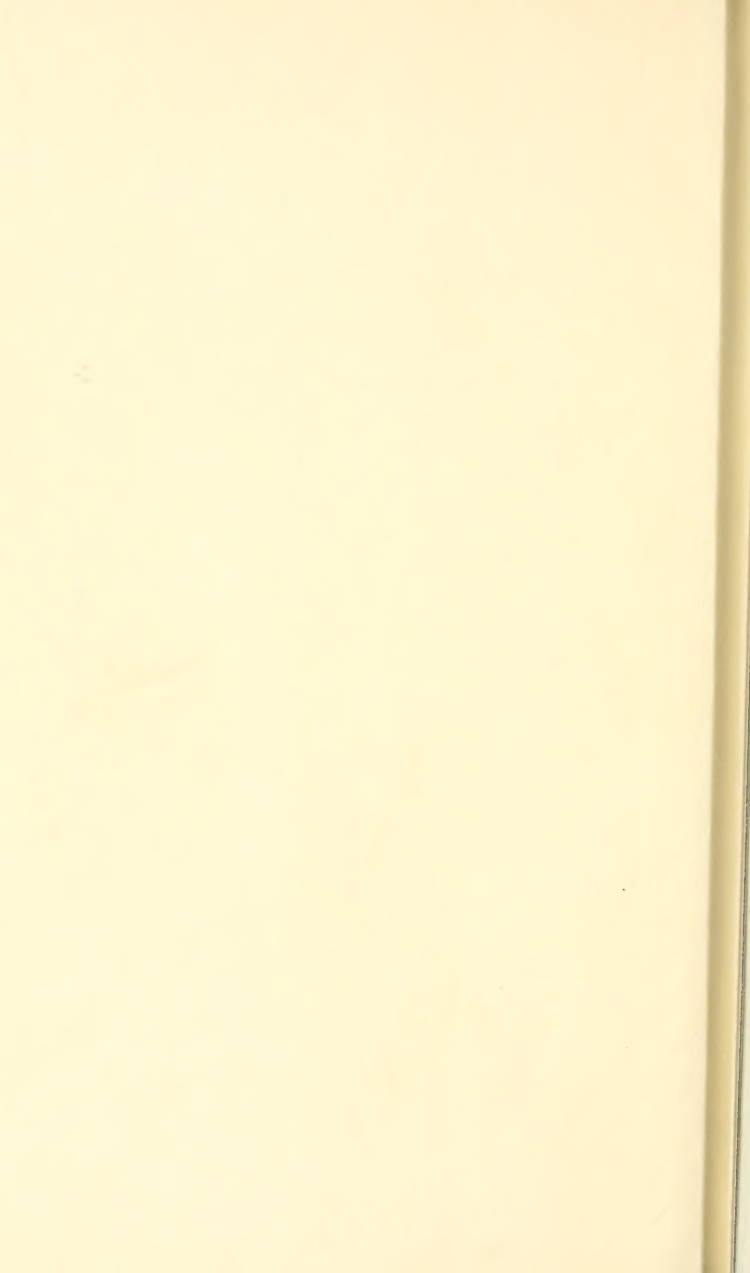














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