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Jane Clegg

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JANE CLEGG

JANE CLEGG: A PLAY IN THREE ACTS.
BY ST JOHN G. ERVINE

NEW YORK

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY. MCMXXIV

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TO

BERNARD SHAW



PERSONS IN THE PLAY

HENRY CLEGG.

JANE CLEGG, *his wife.*

JOHNNIE CLEGG } *his children.*
JENNY CLEGG }

MRS CLEGG, *his mother.*

MR MORRISON.

MR MUNCE.

Jane Clegg was performed for the first time at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, on April 21st, 1913, by Miss Horniman's Company, with the following cast:—

HENRY CLEGG . . .	MR BERNARD COPPING
JANE CLEGG . . .	MISS SYBIL THORNDIKE
MRS CLEGG . . .	MISS CLARE GREET
JENNY CLEGG . . .	MISS MABEL SALKELD
JOHNNIE CLEGG . . .	MASTER TOMMY NICKSON
MR MUNCE . . .	MR ELIOT MAKEHAM
MR MORRISON . . .	MR ERNEST HAINES

It was subsequently played by the same Company at the Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, London, on May 19th, 1913.

The play was produced by Mr Lewis Casson.

JANE CLEGG

ACT I

JANE CLEGG, *a tall, dark woman, aged thirty-two years, is seated at a large table, sewing. It is almost nine o'clock, and, as the evening is chilly, a bright fire burns in the grate. The room has a cosy air, although it is furnished in the undistinguished manner characteristic of the homes of lower middle-class people. A corner of the table is reserved for a meal for a late-comer. JOHNNIE and JENNY, aged ten and eight years respectively, are playing on a rug in front of the fire. The girl is impatient and sometimes knocks over the structures which her brother laboriously builds. MRS CLEGG, the grandmother of the children, is seated in a low rocking-chair, her arms folded across her breast, idly watching them. She is a stout, coarse, and very sentimental woman, and her voice has in it a continual note of querulousness. She glances at the clock and then speaks to her daughter-in-law.*

MRS CLEGG. I can't think wot's keepin' 'Enry.

JANE CLEGG. [*without looking up from her sewing.*] Busy, I suppose.

MRS CLEGG. 'E's always busy. I don't believe men are 'alf so busy as they make out they are! Besides I know 'Enry! I 'aven't 'ad the motherin' of 'im for nothink. 'E don't kill 'imself with work, 'Enry don't.

JANE CLEGG. [*in an undertone.*] Oh, hush, mother, before the children.

MRS CLEGG. Oh, I daresay they know all about 'im. Children knows more about their parents nowadays than their parents knows about them, from wot I can see of it.

JANE CLEGG. Henry's work keeps him out late. It isn't as if he had regular hours like other men. A traveller isn't like ordinary people.

MRS CLEGG. No, that's true. It isn't a proper life for a man, not travellin' isn't. A married man, any'ow. They see too much. I don't believe in men seein' too much. It unsettles 'em.

JANE CLEGG. Oh, I don't know! Some men are born to be unsettled and some aren't. I suppose that's the way with everything.

MRS CLEGG. You take things too calm, you do. I 'aven't any patience with you! Look

at the way you took it when 'e went after that woman! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Oh, please, please!

MRS CLEGG. I'd 'ave tore 'er 'air off. That was the least you could 'ave done.

JENNY. [*knocking the bricks over.*] Oh, I'm tired of this game.

JOHNNIE. There! You've gone and done it again. Why can't you play properly?

MRS CLEGG. Wot you playin' at, Johnnie?

JOHNNIE. [*crossly.*] A game, grannie!

MRS CLEGG. I know you're playin' a game! What kind of a game?

JOHNNIE. [*beginning to build up the bricks again.*] Oh, only a game, grannie. I'm pretending to be mother, and Jenny's pretending to be father. We're building a house with these bricks, but it's no good. . . . Jenny keeps on knocking it all down.

JANE CLEGG. Jenny, dear, that's very naughty!

JENNY. It takes so long, mother!

JOHNNIE. Well, you can't play this game unless you go slowly. It's awful responsibility building a house.

MRS CLEGG. Don't use such big words, Johnnie. It isn't natural for a child your age to be talkin' like that.

JENNY, *laughing mischievously, scatters the bricks.*

Oh, oh, you naughty little girl! 'Owver could you!

JOHNNIE. Oh, don't, Jenny! You've spoilt it all.

JENNY. It's such a silly game! Let's play something quick.

JANE CLEGG. Jenny, you must go to bed.

JENNY. [*petulantly.*] Oh, mother!

MRS CLEGG. You 'aven't no patience, young woman, that's wot you 'aven't.

JOHNNIE. She spoils everything.

JENNY. Well, I like quick games. Building houses takes an awful long time. Let's play something else!

JANE CLEGG. No, Jenny, you must go to bed. You can't play any more games to-night.

JENNY. Mother!

JANE CLEGG. Run along, now!

MRS CLEGG. See! That's wot you get for bein' naughty.

JENNY. I didn't mean to be naughty, mother.

JOHNNIE. No, but you were.

JENNY. Please, mother, I'm sorry. Let me stay up a little while longer.

She puts her arms about her mother's neck affectionately.

JANE CLEGG. That'll do, dear. Kiss grannie, and go to bed.

JENNY. [*beginning to whimper.*] I didn't mean any harm!

JANE CLEGG. [*kissing her.*] Good-night, dear!
The child stands about reluctantly, rubbing her eyes.

Now, run along quickly!

JENNY. I don't want to go yet.

MRS CLEGG. Let 'er stay up a while longer, 'til 'er father comes 'ome. She didn't mean to be naughty, did you, dear?

She pulls JENNY to her, and clasps her in her arms.

JENNY. [*still whimpering.*] No, grannie.

MRS CLEGG. There, you see, she didn't mean it.

MRS CLEGG. Kiss your grannie good-night, Jenny, and go to bed.

JENNY. [*now crying loudly.*] Father'd let me stay up.

MRS CLEGG. You might as well let 'er stay now. You forgive 'er, don't you, Johnnie?

JANE CLEGG. [*firmly.*] Jenny, go to bed at once, dear.

MRS CLEGG. [*hurriedly and testily.*] Oh, my

dear Jane, don't lose your temper, wotever you do! [*to JENNY.*] 'Ere, my sweet'cart, gimme a kiss and say good-night. There, there, now! You know it was your own fault, don't you? You were a naughty girl, weren't you? Now, now, stop cryin', do! I can't bear to 'ear a child cryin'. 'Ere, 'ere's a penny for you!

JENNY. [*putting up her lips to be kissed.*] Good-night, grannie.

MRS CLEGG. [*kissing her warmly.*] Good-night, my sweet'cart.

JENNY *goes sulkily towards the door.*

JANE CLEGG. Kiss your brother good-night, Jenny!

JENNY. No, I don't want to.

JANE CLEGG. Kiss your brother good-night, Jenny!

JENNY *stands irresolutely for a moment, and then goes toward her brother. She kisses him, and then, after a pause, gives him a push which knocks him over.*

JENNY. There, spiteful thing!

MRS CLEGG. Oh, you wicked little girl!

JANE CLEGG. Jenny!

JENNY. What?

JANE CLEGG. Come here.

JENNY. Yes, mother.

She approaches her mother.

JANE CLEGG. Why did you strike Johnnie like that ?

JENNY. I don't know, mother. I just wanted to.

MRS CLEGG. But you shouldn't just want to do things.

JOHNNIE. She didn't hurt me, mother. You didn't mean to hurt me, did you, Jenny ?

JENNY. [*crying again*]. No.

JANE CLEGG. Well, say you're sorry, and go to bed.

JENNY. [*putting her arms round JOHNNIE'S neck.*] I'm sorry, Johnnie. I didn't mean to be unkind.

JOHNNIE *kisses her ardently.*

JOHNNIE. I'll come to bed, too, Jenny, so's you shan't be lonely.

MRS CLEGG. There, now ! Isn't that just like the Good Samaritan ? You are a good boy, Johnnie. 'Ere ! 'Ere's a kiss for you.

She kisses him noisily.

JOHNNIE. You gave Jenny a penny.

MRS CLEGG. Oh, oh, that's wot it is, is it ? Well, 'ere you are then. Now run along the two of you, and don't get quarrellin' together, wot-ever you do.

JOHNNIE. Thank you, grannie.

He kisses her, and then kisses his mother.

Good-night, mother. Oh, I forgot the bricks. I must put them away. Jenny, come and help.

JENNY. No, I don't want to.

MRS CLEGG. Oh, now, that is ungrateful of you.

JENNY. I'm going to bed. Good-night!

She goes out.

MRS CLEGG. That child gets more 'eadstrong every day. Jus' like 'er father was, bless 'er. And yet I can't help likin' 'er for it. It reminds me of 'im w'en 'e was 'er age!

JOHNNIE. [*who has collected his toys and put them away.*] Good-night, grannie and mother.

He kisses them again and goes out.

MRS CLEGG. You was a bit 'ard on 'er, Jane, I must say.

JANE CLEGG. She must do what she is told. I wish you wouldn't intercede for her and give her pennies. It only makes her worse.

MRS CLEGG. Well, well, I can't 'elp it. She's so like 'er poor father!

JANE CLEGG. I wish Henry would come home. It isn't often he's as late as this.

MRS CLEGG. [*sniffily.*] Goodness only knows where 'e is! Though 'e is my own son, 'e don't

be'ave proper, and it's your fault for lettin' 'im.

JANE CLEGG. I can't prevent him from doing what he likes.

MRS CLEGG. Yes, you can. Any woman can. Watch 'im, that's wot you got to do. Never take your eyes offa them. That's wot I done with 'is father. 'E was the same, always wanted to be gallivantin' about. Busy, 'e said. I busied 'im. I never 'ardly let 'im out of my sight.

JANE CLEGG. What's the good of talking like that. I can't follow Henry everywhere. Your husband's work was at home. It was easy for you to watch him. Besides, I don't want to watch Henry. I don't see any pleasure in being married to a man who has to be watched.

MRS CLEGG. Oh, you're unnacherl, you are. I wouldn't 'ave felt 'appy if I didn't know all George was doin' of. It isn't as if you 'adn't no reason to watch 'im.

JANE CLEGG. Well, that's all over now, isn't it.

MRS CLEGG. I'm sure I 'ope so. It was a perfect scandal the way 'e went on with that . . . wot was 'er name?

JANE CLEGG. I don't know. Does it matter?

MRS CLEGG. No, I suppose it don't. The brazened 'ussy! Wot I can't understand is why you was so calm about it.

JANE CLEGG. You have to make allowances.

MRS CLEGG. Allowances! There's a limit to allowances. That's wot I think.

JANE CLEGG. [*rising and putting her sewing away.*] Yes, I suppose so.

MRS CLEGG. I suppose you must be fond of 'im, or you wouldn't 'ave married 'im.

JANE CLEGG. I was very fond of him.

MRS CLEGG. But you're not now, eh?

JANE CLEGG. [*returning to her seat.*] Oh, I don't know about that. I suppose I'm as fond of him as any woman is of her husband after she's been married to him twelve years. It's a long time, isn't it?

MRS CLEGG. 'Orrible!

JANE CLEGG. Do you know why I didn't leave Henry when that happened? It was simply because I couldn't.

MRS CLEGG. 'Ow du mean?

JANE CLEGG. Isn't it simple enough? Johnnie was four and Jenny was two. Henry had a good situation. If I had left him, I should not have earned more than a pound a week at the best, and I couldn't have looked after the

children and worked as well. I don't suppose I should have got work at all here. A woman who leaves her husband on moral grounds is treated as badly as a woman who runs away with another man.

MRS CLEGG. Well, of course, it isn't right to leave your 'usband. Till death do you part, that's wot the Bible says. I wasn't 'intin' at anythink of that sort. I only suggested that you should be firm with 'im.

JANE CLEGG. Why shouldn't I leave him, if he isn't loyal?

MRS CLEGG. Oh, my dear, 'ow can you ask such a question? Wotever would people say?

JANE CLEGG. But why shouldn't I leave him?

MRS CLEGG. Because it isn't right, that's why.

JANE CLEGG. But why isn't it right.

MRS CLEGG. You are a one for askin' questions! Nice thing it would be I'm sure if women started leavin' their 'usbands like that.

JANE CLEGG. If I'd been able to, I should have left Henry then. I hadn't any money, so I couldn't.

MRS CLEGG. This is wicked, this is. Doesn't the Bible say you should take 'im for better or worse?

JANE CLEGG. The Prayer Book !

MRS CLEGG. Well, it's the same thing.

JANE CLEGG. I don't care what it says. It isn't right to ask a woman to take a man for worse. Or a man to take a woman.

MRS CLEGG. But you promised. You knew wot you was doin' of.

JANE CLEGG. No, I didn't. Do you think I knew that Henry did that sort of thing, or that I would have married him if I had ? He married me under false pretences, that's what he did. He knew that woman before he married me. If he told a lie about his samples, he'd be put in jail, but no one thinks anything of his lying to me.

MRS CLEGG. Well, men is men, and there's an end of it. You just 'ave to put up with them.

JANE CLEGG. I don't believe in putting up with things unless you can't help yourself. I couldn't help myself before, but I can now. Uncle Tom's money makes that possible.

MRS CLEGG. That made 'im angry, that did. When you wouldn't let 'im 'ave the money to start for 'imself.

JANE CLEGG. You know quite well he'd have lost it all. He's a good traveller, but he couldn't control a business of his own. He's not that

sort. I made up my mind when I got the money that I would spend it on Johnny and Jenny. I want to give them both a good chance. You know how fond Johnny is of playing with engines and making things. I want to spend the money on making an engineer of him, if that's what he wants to be. I couldn't bear the thought of him becoming one of those little clerks! . . .

[*She makes a shuddering gesture.*] Oh!

MRS CLEGG. There's worse than clerks.

JANE CLEGG. I daresay. Why should I give my money to Henry?

MRS CLEGG. 'E's your 'usband, isn't 'e?

JANE CLEGG. I don't see what that's got to do with it.

MRS CLEGG. Well, that beats all. I thought you was a Christian, Jane.

JANE CLEGG. [*wearily.*] Oh, I don't know what I am. I only know I'm made to do things that I can't understand for no earthly reason whatever. I must do this and I must do that, and no one tells me why, I wish I'd been well-educated.

MRS CLEGG. Thank goodness you're not. I don't believe in all this education for women. It unsettles them. I've never been educated, and I'm 'appy enough.

JANE CLEGG. So's a worm, I suppose.

MRS CLEGG. [*bridling.*] Of course, if you're going to insult me! . . .

JANE CLEGG. No, I don't want to do that. I only mean that being content isn't everything. I want to know things. I hate being told to do things without knowing why I should do them. It doesn't seem right somehow to have a mind and not use it.

MRS CLEGG. Well, I don't know wot you mean. I believe in bein' 'appy no matter wot 'appens. That's good enough for me. I don't want to know things. I want to be let alone, an' be 'appy.

JANE CLEGG. Mebbe you're right. [*They are quiet for a moment.*] Oh, isn't it just awful to think that I shall sit here always, mending things and waiting for Henry to come home!

MRS CLEGG. No, it isn't awful at all. It's nacherl. It's always bin like that, and it always will. It's no good flyin' in the face of Providence.

JANE CLEGG. I never see anything or go anywhere. I have to cook and wash and nurse and mend and teach! . . . And then I'm not certain of Henry. That's what's so hard. I give him everything, and he isn't faithful.

MRS CLEGG. 'E was always a man for women.

There's a lot like that. They don't mean no 'arm, but some'ow they do it. I 'eard tell once of someone that said it was silly of women to complain about things like that, and mebbe 'e was right. They're not made like us, men aren't. I never wanted but one man in my life, but my 'usband, bless 'im, 'e was never satisfied. 'E used to say it near broke 'is 'eart to be a Christian! 'E 'ad a great respect for Turks an' foreigners. 'Enry takes after 'im. [*She pauses for a moment.*] I dunno! Men's a funny lot wotever way you take them, an' it's my belief a wise woman shuts 'er eyes to more'n 'alf wot goes on in the world. She'd be un'appy if she didn't, an' it's no good bein' un'appy.

JANE CLEGG. I'm not like that. I demand as much as I give. It isn't fair to take all and give nothing.

MRS CLEGG. [*impatently.*] But! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Oh, I know what you're going to say. I don't care what men say or what anybody says; Henry must give me as much as I give to him. That's only decent.

MRS CLEGG. Well, I'm sure I 'ope you get it. There's few women does. Men is guilty sinners. You can't get over that. If they ain't sinnin' one way, they're sinnin' another, an' you can't

stop 'em. The Lord can't do it, an' it ain't likely you can.

The street door is opened and slammed to.

JANE CLEGG. I suppose this is him!

The door opens, and HENRY CLEGG, a middle-sized man, good-natured, genial, fairly handsome, though a little fleshly and somewhat weak-looking, ENTERS. His manner is brisk. He has a quick way of speaking, and his actions are rapid. He is a man of nervous temperament, to whom repose is impossible. Although he is superficially open and frank, there is about him an air of furtiveness, almost meanness, and he will turn away quickly from a steady look. He goes to his wife and kisses her.

HENRY CLEGG. Well, old girl, feeling anxious, eh? [*He goes to his mother and kisses her.*]

JANE CLEGG. I thought you were probably working late.

MRS CLEGG. You didden ought to be so late, 'Enry, you know you oughtn't.

HENRY CLEGG. I had to go into the country this morning about a big order. Hadn't time to look round or do anything. [*He goes to the table.*] Is this my supper?

JANE CLEGG. Yes.

HENRY CLEGG. Any letters ?

JANE CLEGG. [*taking a letter off the fireplace and handing it to him.*] Yes, this one was brought round from the office this afternoon by a boy. I've not seen him before.

HENRY CLEGG. [*taking the letter, and opening it.*] Thanks. Oh, yes, they got a new boy in a day or two ago. [*He glances hastily through the letter.*] What'd they send it to me for ? [*He looks at a cheque which is enclosed with the letter.*] Now, there's a dam silly thing !

JANE CLEGG. What is ?

HENRY CLEGG. Armstrong & Brown have settled their account and the cheque's made payable to me. Someb'dy ought to get the sack for that !

MRS CLEGG. Why ? You're honest, aren't you ?

HENRY CLEGG. Yes, mother, but supposing I wasn't, eh ?

MRS CLEGG. 'Ow can you talk like that, 'Enry, an' you brought up the way you was.

HENRY CLEGG. All very fine, mother. If I wasn't honest, and was to hop round to the bank to-morrow morning, and cash this—well, it 'ud be all umpydoodelum with some chap's job, that's all. [*He puts the letter and cheque in his*

pocket-book, and sitting down, commences to eat his meal.] I'm done up. Absolutely. Worn-out with work. The chaps at the office are all cursing and swearing at the amount they have to do.

MRS CLEGG. [*becoming concerned.*] Poor 'Enry! 'E ought to get more 'elp, Mr 'Arper ought. It ain't right to work people so 'ard.

HENRY CLEGG. He'll never get any more help. He's not that sort. Work the life and soul out of you, he will. It's enough to make a chap turn Socialist.

MRS CLEGG. Oh, don't you go an' get mixed up with none of them. I've 'eard some 'orrible things about them.

JANE CLEGG. Why don't you and the others refuse to be overworked? He'd have to give in if you stood up to him.

HENRY CLEGG. Stand up to him! Fancy a lot of mouldy clerks standin' up to anyone. It's no good me standin' up by myself: the others wouldn't support me, and I'd get the sack. Jolly glad some of 'em would be to get my job.

MRS CLEGG. If there was a woman or two in your office, I bet you they'd soon show Mr 'Arper they wouldn't be treated the way 'e treats you men.

HENRY CLEGG. Yes, I daresay. It's all very

well for a lot of women to talk. They haven't got any responsibilities. [JANE CLEGG *laughs.*] Oh, you can laugh. These young girls comin' into offices, what responsibility have they got, eh? Live on their fathers they do, and then go and take low salaries and do their fathers out of jobs. It's easy enough to be independent when you've got someone to fall back on. Who could I fall back on if I got the sack, eh?

MRS CLEGG. Well, you'd be all right. Jane wouldn't see you go short if you was to lose your place, not with all that money of hers.

HENRY CLEGG. Her money! Huh! Fat lot of good it is to me.

JANE CLEGG. Shall I get you some more meat, Henry?

HENRY CLEGG. [*stretching himself in the manner of a replete animal.*] No, thanks. I've had enough!

He rises and crosses to the fire, and sits down beside his mother. He lights a pipe. JANE removes the remnants of the meal.

MRS CLEGG. [*taking a cushion from behind her.*] 'Ere, 'Enry, put that be'ind you. You must be wore out.

She rises and puts the cushion behind his head. He settles himself into it comfortably.

HENRY CLEGG. I could have done well for myself with that money if Jane had let me have it.

MRS CLEGG. I know you could, 'Enry. I've often told her that. [JANE *re-enters the room.*]
'Aven't I, Jane ?

JANE CLEGG. What, mother ?

MRS CLEGG. 'Aven't I often tole you wot good use 'Enry could 'ave made of your money if you'd on'y let 'im 'ave it ?

JANE CLEGG. Yes, mother, you have.

MRS CLEGG. See ! But she don't take no interest in wot I say. Says you're not fit to 'ave charge of it !

HENRY CLEGG. [*angrily.*] Who's not fit to have charge of it ?

JANE CLEGG. I didn't say that. I said you were not so good at managing a business of your own, as you are at being a traveller. That was all.

HENRY CLEGG. How do you know, eh ?

JANE CLEGG. I just know.

She brings a chair up to the fire, and sits down between her husband and her mother-in-law.

HENRY CLEGG. [*surlily.*] Blasted fine thing, I must say, when a man's own wife makes little of him.

JANE CLEGG. I don't make little of you, Henry. I just treat you as you are.

HENRY CLEGG. I could have doubled that money three times over. I could still do it. I heard to-day about something! . . . Look here, Jane, if you would let me have two hundred of it, I could pull off a good thing in about six months. Straight, I could.

JANE CLEGG. What could you pull off?

HENRY CLEGG. Well, I can't give many particulars about it, because I told the chap I wouldn't say a word to anyone, not even to you. He knew you'd come in for a bit of money, and he mentioned it himself. He naturally thought I could get the money easy enough. I didn't like to tell him you'd got it, and wouldn't let me have any of it. Makes a man look such a damned fool, that sort of thing. It's a bit of a spec. at present, of course, and there's one or two's after it. That's why he told me not to tell anyone.

MRS CLEGG. I should think you could tell Jane. That's on'y nacherel, she bein' your wife.

HENRY CLEGG. No, I promised I wouldn't.

JANE CLEGG. Don't bother, Henry. I know you don't like breaking promises. Your friend

won't get my money. I've made up my mind that I shall keep it for Johnnie and Jenny.

HENRY CLEGG. [*with great fury.*] There, you hear that, mother! That's the sort of woman she is. Not a spark of love for me in her.

JANE CLEGG. You know, Henry! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. Don't talk to me. I don't want to hear what you've got to say.

He begins to stride up and down the room, puffing quickly at his pipe. JANE sits still, MRS CLEGG weeps.

MRS CLEGG. It's no pleasure to me to sit 'ere an' 'ear all this.

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, shut your silly mouth. I've enough on my mind without you adding to it.

MRS CLEGG. That's not the way to speak to your mother, 'Enry.

HENRY CLEGG. [*snapping at her.*] Isn't it? Well, it's the only way I'm going to speak to her, see! Nice thing when a man's chances in life are spoiled by his wife.

MRS CLEGG. I'd let you 'ave the money soon enough if it was mine. You know I would, 'Enry. [*She becomes inaudible through weeping.*]

HENRY, tiring of walking up and down the room, returns to his seat in front of the fire, and sits down moodily. JANE continues

sewing. There is quiet for a moment, except for MRS CLEGG'S weeping.

JANE CLEGG. Perhaps you'd better go to bed, mother. You're tired.

MRS CLEGG. I don't want to go to bed. I'm not tired. I'm 'urt, that's wot I am. 'Urt.

HENRY CLEGG. I should think so too. So'd anybody be. Seven hundred pounds she has eating its head off in a bank, and won't lend me two hundred of it. Lend it, mind you. I don't want her to give it to me, though I don't see why she shouldn't.

MRS CLEGG. [*tearfully.*] It says in the Bible wot's 'ers is yours!

JANE CLEGG. [*getting up and moving towards the door.*] Come, mother, it's time you went to bed. You've worn yourself out to-day.

MRS CLEGG. I'm not goin' to bed yet. I've a right to sit up with my own son, 'aven't I? I'm not goin' to be ordered about.

JANE CLEGG. I'm not ordering you about. I'm going to bed myself. It's no good sitting here talking like this. Henry wants me to give him money which I want to keep for Johnnie and Jenny. He doesn't tell me what he wants it for. He expects me to hand it over to him without any questions! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. I can't tell you what it is yet. I promised the chap! . . .

MRS CLEGG. You wouldn't 'ave 'im break 'is word, would you?

JANE CLEGG. It wouldn't be the first time he broke his word.

HENRY CLEGG. [*pettishly.*] There! There she goes again! Haven't I apologised for that, and said I was sorry? Haven't I? And swore I'd never do it again? Can't you let bygones be bygones? Unforgiving spirit, you have.

MRS CLEGG. I didden think you'd go an' rake things up like that, Jane. 'E said 'e was sorry, didden 'e?

JANE CLEGG. Well, it doesn't matter very much about that. I don't care now. You shall not have a farthing until I know what you want it for, and only then if I think it's worth while. Aren't you coming, mother?

MRS CLEGG. [*fractiously.*] In a minute, Jane.

JANE CLEGG. I'm going now. Good-night.

MRS CLEGG. [*getting up from her seat laboriously.*] All right, I'll come too.

JANE *is standing in the doorway.* HENRY CLEGG *is seated before the fire.* MRS CLEGG *moves towards her daughter-in-law.* *There is a knock at the door.*

'Ooever can that be at this time of night ?

JANE goes to the door and opens it. MR MUNCE appears. He asks if HENRY is at home, and is informed that he is.

HENRY CLEGG. [*hastily.*] Hilloa, Munce, is that you ?

MUNCE. [*entering the hall.*] Yes, ole man. I want to see you partickler.

HENRY CLEGG. Come on in, will you.

MUNCE, a weedy person of the race-course type, ENTERS the room. JANE, who has closed the street-door, follows him. Introducing JANE to MUNCE.

My wife.

JANE CLEGG. How do you do.

MUNCE. Pleased to meet you.

HENRY CLEGG. My mother.

MRS CLEGG. Glad to 'ave the pleasure.

MUNCE. Same 'ere. I'm sorry to come in so late, but I wanted to discuss a bit of business with your 'usband, Mrs Clegg. Very important.

JANE CLEGG. Oh, yes. You'd like to be left alone with Henry ?

MUNCE. [*very affably.*] If you don't mind.

JANE CLEGG. No, not at all. I was just going to bed.

MUNCE. Ah, I know. Early to bed and early

to rise, makes a man 'ealthy, wealthy, *an'* wise. Quite right, Mrs Clegg. 'Ear, 'ear.

JANE CLEGG. Good-night, Mr Munce.

MUNCE. Good-night, Mrs Clegg. Pleased to 'ave the pleasure of your acquaintance, I'm sure. [*to* MRS CLEGG.] Good-night, ma'am, Glad to 'ave met you.

MRS CLEGG. Good-night, sir. Good-night, 'Enry.

HENRY CLEGG. Good-night, mother. [*He kisses her and she goes out.*] I shan't be long, Jane.

JANE *goes out.*

MUNCE. Well, ole chap, 'ow goes it ?

HENRY CLEGG. Rotten !

MUNCE. Sorry to 'ear that. Didden expect' to see me roun' 'ere to-night, eih ? I bin lookin' for you bes' part the dy !

HENRY CLEGG. I've been busy, old chap ! . . .

MUNCE. Yes, I know all about that. Thought I'd catch you about now. You know wot I come about, don't you ?

HENRY CLEGG. [*desperately.*] I'm sorry, Munce, I can't let you have it just yet.

MUNCE. Wot you mean you can't let me 'ave it ? You gotta let me 'ave it, see !

HENRY CLEGG. Don't speak so loudly, old

chap. You see I've had rotten luck lately. Haven't pulled off a single winner. Not one.

MUNCE. That's not my fault, is it ?

HENRY CLEGG. No, of course not, only it means I can't pay up just now.

MUNCE. Well, that's a nice thing I must say. 'Ow do you think I'm going to live, eih ? I can't afford to lie out of my money like that. I've got bills of my own to meet.

HENRY CLEGG. I know, old chap. Of course, I'm very sorry.

MUNCE. Sorry ! What's the good of bein' sorry. That don't 'elp matters. Do you know 'ow much you owe me, eih ?

HENRY CLEGG. You haven't given me much chance to forget it, have you ?

MUNCE. Twenty-five pounds. That's what it is, and then you 'ave the cheek to tell me you can't pay. That's cool, that is. What've you done with all that money your wife 'ad left to 'er.

HENRY CLEGG. Nothing.

MUNCE. Well, then, why can't you pay up ? Look 'ere, Clegg, I'm not jokin'. I'm in a mess. Straight ! I must 'ave the money this week. Absolute !

HENRY CLEGG. What's the good of talking

like that! If I can't let you have it, I can't, can I?

MUNCE. But you can. You've jus' told me you still got your wife's money.

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, I know! . . .

MUNCE. Look 'ere, what you done with it, eih?

HENRY CLEGG. I haven't done anything with it.

MUNCE. You know you're not actin' straight, you aren't. I saw you the other day, you know.

HENRY CLEGG. Oh! Where?

MUNCE. Yes, an' you 'ad a nice bit o' skirt with you, too.

HENRY CLEGG. I say, shut up, you fool.

MUNCE. Oh, it's all right. I know all about it. I never give a pal away. No fear.

HENRY CLEGG. [*airily.*] Oh, there's nothing to give away. I only met her by accident.

MUNCE. Yes, I do not think? Oh, ho, ho, ho! Excuse me laughin', ole chap, won't you? Accident! Oh, ho, ho, ho! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. I say, don't make so much noise. They went upstairs to sleep, you know.

MUNCE. Sorry, ole man, but look 'ere you know, puttin' all jokes aside, when can you let me 'ave the money?

HENRY CLEGG. I don't know!

MUNCE. Don't know! But you oughta know. What am I goin' to do, eih?

HENRY CLEGG. Perhaps it'll be all right next week.

MUNCE. Yes, an' per'aps not. I know. What you done with your ole woman's money?

HENRY CLEGG. I tell you I haven't done anything with it!

MUNCE. Don't you tell me. I know. You bin spendin' it on that bit of skirt I saw you with this afternoon, that's what you bin doin', 'stead o' payin' your debts.

HENRY CLEGG. [*anxiously.*] Don't shout, old chap.

MUNCE. It's enough to make a chap shout ain't it?—Goin' an' bluein' all your money on a tart, an' you owes me twenty-five poun's. Twenty-five poun's. An' 'ere's me don't know where to turn for money.

HENRY CLEGG. I tell you I haven't spent it on her. Straight, I haven't. Look here, I may as well be honest with you. The girl you saw me with this afternoon, she's a friend of mine, see!

MUNCE. Yes, I thought so. Fine lookin' bit o' goods, too!

HENRY CLEGG. [*proudly.*] Not bad, is she?

MUNCE. I s'pose your missus don't know about 'er, eih? Ho, ho, ho, ho!

HENRY CLEGG. Don't laugh so loud, old chap. My wife and me don't get on very well. You know!

MUNCE. [*sympathetically.*] I know, old chap. Funny, ain't it, 'ow the one you're married to ain't 'alf so nice as the one you keep.

HENRY CLEGG. And you see, well, things haven't been going right with me lately. Of course, Kitty, that's her name, not my wife, the other one, she's always hard up! . . .

MUNCE. Just what I said, didden I? Spendin' all your blinkin' money on a tart 'stead o' payin' your debts of honour. Debts of honour, mind you! That's wot I call doin' the dirty!

HENRY CLEGG. I'm in a rare old mess, that's wot I am. Kitty's bin to the doctor this mornin'! She's not sure! . . .

MUNCE. [*after a prolonged whistle.*] Oh, ho! So's that's 'ow the land lays, is it? So 'elp me!

HENRY CLEGG. I don't know what the devil to do. There's you and Kitty . . . she'll want a bit of money to keep her mouth shut. If I could only raise a bit, I'd take her off to Canada or somewhere. I'm damned fond of her, that's

what I am. I can't stick my wife. She's hard, Munce, hard as hell.

MUNCE. I 'ope you won't do nothink rash, not afore you've paid me my whack.

HENRY CLEGG. I haven't got the money to be rash. I wish I had.

MUNCE. Well, I dunno. Seems t' me I shall lose what you owe me. I shall 'ave to do some-think Absolute! [*He gets up, twirls round on his foot, and then sits down again.*] What I can't make out is, what you done with your wife's money.

HENRY CLEGG. [*angrily.*] I tell you I haven't done anything with it.

MUNCE. Well, why can't you pay me then?

HENRY CLEGG. I haven't had it. She's got it!

MUNCE. Well, tell her to give it to you.

HENRY CLEGG. She won't let me have it, not a blasted farthing of it!

MUNCE. What! [*He gapes at CLEGG in astonishment, and then goes off into helpless roars of laughter.*] Oh, you bloomin' fool! Ho, ho, ho, ho! Excuse me laughin', won't you? Oh, ho, ho, ho! *Won't let you 'ave it?* So 'elp me! 'Ere! 'Ere, I say, are you 'er 'usband, or 'er little blue-eyed lad, eih? Oh, ho ho, ho!

HENRY CLEGG. Shut up, you fool!

MUNCE. 'Ere, not so much o' that, if you please. A man what owes what you owe me, an' runs a tart! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. [*piteously.*] Do keep quiet, old chap. I didn't mean to cut up rough.

MUNCE. I should think not, indeed.

He lies back in his chair, looking a little sulky. Gradually however, his features relax and he gives way to his sense of the ridiculousness of CLEGG'S position.

HENRY CLEGG. They'll hear you, if you don't stop it.

MUNCE. You're a nice one, I must say. Fancy, a man lettin' a woman treat 'im like that. Be a man, old chap; be a man!

HENRY CLEGG. That's all very fine, but you're not married to her.

MUNCE. No, but I'd bloomin soon make 'er change 'er toon if I was.

HENRY CLEGG. Yes, you'd do a lot.

MUNCE. The idea! Du meana say she ain't let you 'ave some of it?

HENRY CLEGG. Not a sou.

MUNCE. Gawblimey! Seven 'undred quid, wassen it?

HENRY CLEGG. Yes.

MUNCE. You know you didden oughta be a man, you didden. I mean t' say, ole chap, it ain't right. You oughtn't t' let 'er do it, y' know!

HENRY CLEGG. How the hell can I help it. It's her money, isn't it? Her old fool of an uncle left it to her.

MUNCE. But you're 'er 'usband, ole man. You're the 'ead o' the fam'ly. You oughta be lookin' after it for 'er.

HENRY CLEGG. Well, she won't let me.

MUNCE. Let you! Make 'er, man. Give 'er a clout aside the 'ead if she gives you any lip. Don't 'ave no 'umbug!

HENRY CLEGG. That wouldn't do any good. I've begged her to let me have a couple of hundred of it, but she won't. I could have cleared you off, and seen Kitty didn't come to any harm! . . . Oh, doesn't it make you sick, Munce, to think you've got to go with your cap in your hand to your wife, and be refused?

MUNCE. But why be refused? I wouldn't.

HENRY CLEGG. I don't know what to do. [*He buries his head in his hands for a while, and then sits up again in his chair.*] You see, old chap, I can't pay at present, so it's no good keeping you up any longer.

MUNCE. That's all very fine, Clegg, but it don't 'elp me out of my difficulty, do it? I'm in a nole, an' you're the one that'll 'ave to get me out of it. [*Angrily.*] You don't think I'm goin' to be bust up when you owe me money enough to clear me, an' your wife's got sever 'undred in the bank, do you? You got to get it, my boy, that's what you got to do, an' jolly slippy too.

HENRY CLEGG. [*weakly.*] How can I get it?

MUNCE. I dunno, but you got to get it some'ow. I must 'ave it by nex' Thursday, that's all.

HENRY CLEGG. [*shrugging his shoulders.*] You might as well say you want it in five minutes.

MUNCE. No good talkin' like that. You *got* to get it, or there'll be trouble. See! I don't want to be nasty, you know, but I could be nasty if I wanted to, couldn't I?

HENRY CLEGG. Eh?

MUNCE. Your missus would be interested to 'ear about Kitty an' the interestin' event, eih, woulden she?

HENRY CLEGG. You wouldn't give me away, would you? I told you in confidence.

MUNCE. An' 'ow about my twenty-five quid, eih? Mebbe she'd like to 'ear about that. An' ole 'Arper, 'e'd be delighted to 'ear as 'ow 'is

traveller owed a bookie twenty-five quid, an' didden know 'ow to pay it, eih ?

HENRY CLEGG. You wouldn't do a dirty trick like that, would you ?

MUNCE. You pay me me money, an' I won't. 'Ang it all, why should I consider you w'en you don't care a dam about me ? I'll be ruined if I don't get the money this week, but you don't think about that. It's all you with you.

HENRY CLEGG. Don't be hard, old chap. I'll do my best, I promise you, I will. Only give me a chance. I'll see if I can get it for you this week. I will, straight. I'll make her give it to me, somehow.

MUNCE. That's right. You stuff 'er up with some yarn or other, an' if she don't give it to you then, make 'er give it to you. [*He rises and prepares to go.*]

HENRY CLEGG. I'll do my best.

MUNCE. [*holding out his hand.*] You'll 'ave to. I'm about desprit, an' that's the God's truth. 'Ere, buck up, ole chap. You'll be all right. She'll pay up right enough. You kiss 'er a bit ; that'll put 'er in a good temper. You on'y got to treat 'em reasonable, an' they're all right. Give 'er a bit of a kiss now an' again, an' she'll be like a lamb. You bin runnin' too much

after that Kitty, y' know, an' neglectin' your missus, an' o' course that gets their backs up. You got to yoomer 'em. I expec' it'll be all right. I woulden feel so perky about it, if I didden know she 'ad that money. Straight, I woulden! Goo'-night, ole chap. [*He shakes hands with CLEGG.*]

HENRY CLEGG. Good-night, old chap.

MUNCE. You be all right, you see!

They go into the hall together, CLEGG opens the door, and MUNCE passes out.

Goo'-night, ole chap. Remember me to the missus!

HENRY CLEGG. Good-night!

He shuts the street-door and returns to the sitting-room. He stands in front of the fire for a few moments in an undecided manner. He puts his hand in his pocket and takes out the cheque from Armstrong & Brown. He fingers it for a while, gazing abstractedly at the fire. Then he puts the cheque back into his pocket, turns down the lamps, and GOES OUT of the room, shutting the door behind him.

ACT II

It is two days later, and JANE CLEGG is seated alone in front of the fire. The table is set for the evening meal. A loud continuous knocking is heard on the street door. She goes to the door and opens it. JENNY, who has been lying against the door, stumbles in as it is opened, and collides with her mother.

JANE CLEGG. My darling, what a noise to make.

JENNY. I wanted to be in first, mother. I couldn't wait for grannie and Johnnie. They're just coming. [*She goes into the street and calls out.*] Come on, grannie! You are a long time.

JANE CLEGG. [*returning to the room.*] It was naughty of you to run away from them like that, Jenny.

MRS CLEGG and JOHNNIE appear in the doorway.

MRS CLEGG. [*out of breath.*] Oh, you young terror, you! Out o' breath, I am!

JENNY. I was first, wasn't I, grannie?

MRS CLEGG. You was, my chickabiddy.

They all come into the sitting-room.

JENNY. I was the first, mother. I betted Johnnie I would.

JOHNNIE. [*removing his coat.*] Bet, Jenny, not betted.

JENNY. It's all the same.

MRS CLEGG. Come along, now, and take off your things, there's a dear. You can take off my boots for me [*in a sort of whisper*] and p'raps I'll give you a penny.

JENNY. Oh, thank you, grannie. [*She hugs the old lady, who bends down and kisses her.*]

JANE CLEGG. Run along, dear, and you, too, Johnnie. Supper'll be ready very soon.

JOHNNIE. Has daddy come home yet, mother?

JANE CLEGG. No, dear, not yet, but perhaps he'll come in in a minute or two. Now, run along.

MRS CLEGG and JOHNNIE *go out and are seen climbing the stairs.*

JENNY. Can I sit next to daddy, mother?

JANE CLEGG. Yes, dear, if he comes.

JENNY. Why doesn't he come? He's always late.

JANE CLEGG. Daddy has a lot to do, dear.

[*She sits down, and the child comes to her and rubs her face against her.*]

JENNY. I like when daddy's here.

JANE CLEGG. Do you, darling ?

JENNY. Yes, and so does grannie.

JANE CLEGG. That's right, dear.

JENNY. Johnnie likes it too, but he likes being with you best.

JANE CLEGG. You like being with me, too, don't you, Jenny ?

JENNY. [*emphatically.*] Of course, mother, dear. [*She puts her arms about her mother's neck, and kisses her.*] I do love you, mother.

JANE CLEGG. My dear !

JOHNNIE. [*from above.*] Jenny !

JENNY. Ye-es !

JOHNNIE. Come on ! Grannie's waiting. [*He is seen looking over the banisters.*] She says she gave you a penny to take off her boots, and you haven't done it.

JENNY. Oh, you do it, Johnnie !

JOHNNIE. Shan't !

JENNY. Beast, beast !

JANE CLEGG. Jenny, dear, you mustn't talk like that. [*She kisses JENNY, and pats her on the head.*] Now, run along, dear, and help your grannie, and when you're ready we'll have supper.

JOHNNIE. Come on, Jenny.

JENNY. Oh, you!

She runs to the foot of the stairs, and pursues her brother. They are heard scuffling and laughing on the stairs. MRS CLEGG is heard saying, "Oh, you naughty little girl!" and "Do give over, do!"

JANE CLEGG. [*calling out to them.*] Johnnie!

JOHNNIE. Yes, mother!

JANE CLEGG. I want you.

JOHNNIE. All right, mother. No, Jenny, don't! Oh! [*He shouts with laughter.*]

JANE CLEGG. Come along, dear!

JOHNNIE. [*running quickly down the stairs.*]
Yes, mother.

He enters the room, shutting the door behind him.

Yes, mother!

JANE CLEGG. Come and sit here. [*He sits down in front of the fire at her feet.*]

JOHNNIE. Can I read again to-night, mother?

JANE CLEGG. It'll soon be supper-time.

JOHNNIE. Just a little while, please.

The door opens and MRS CLEGG and JENNY return.

Jenny, you would like me to read again, wouldn't you?

MRS CLEGG *seats herself on the opposite side of the fire to that at which JANE CLEGG is seated.*

JENNY. [*impetuously.*] Oh, yes, Johnnie.
[*She throws herself down beside him.*]

JOHNNIE. Please, mother!

JANE CLEGG. All right, then. You can read for a little while. I expect your father will be in presently, and then you will have to put the book away!

JOHNNIE. [*rising and going towards the book-shelf.*] Oh, thank you, mother!

MRS CLEGG. 'E's late again!

JANE CLEGG. [*glancing at the clock.*] Oh, no. He seldom comes in before this time.

MRS CLEGG. Well, of course, if you call this early! . . . [*to JENNY.*] 'Ere, come an' sit on my knee. 'Ave you got your book, Johnnie?

JENNY *climbs on to her grannie's knee.*

JOHNNIE. [*returning to his seat on the floor.*]
Yes, grannie!

MRS CLEGG. Well, now you can read to us, can't you? We'll keep as quiet as quiet, won't we, Jenny, eh? [*She hugs the child to her.*]

JENNY. Yes, grannie. What is the book, Johnnie?

JOHNNIE. "The History of the Steam Engine."

JENNY. [*petulantly.*] Oh, no, I don't want to hear that. I want to hear a story.

JOHNNIE. But it's awfully interesting, Jenny.

JENNY. No, I don't like it. [*She climbs off her grannie's knee and goes to her mother, coaxingly*] Please, mother, can't I have a story read to me?

JOHNNIE. But, mother, I want to read about steam engines!

MRS CLEGG. You can't 'ave everythink. You ought to be a little gentleman and read what the lady wants!

JANE CLEGG. What kind of a story do you want, dear?

JENNY. You know, mother. A *real* story, not about steam engines.

JOHNNIE. But that's real, Jenny. Steam engines is real!

JENNY. *Are*, silly, *are*! E-h-h-h! Caught you that time, clever!

A knock on the street door is heard.

JANE CLEGG. There's your father. Johnnie, go and open the door.

JENNY. [*quickly, running to the door.*] No, let me, mother. I'll open it.

JANE CLEGG. All right. Go along.

JENNY *runs down the passage leading to the*

door, and after fumbling with the handle, opens the door.

JENNY. Oh, it isn't daddy!

MR MORRISON. Is Mr Clegg in?

JENNY. No.

JANE CLEGG. Who is it, dear?

JENNY. It's a gentleman, mother!

JANE CLEGG. All right. [*She rises and goes to the door.*]

MR MORRISON. Good-evening, Mrs Clegg!

JANE CLEGG. Good-evening! Oh, it's you, Mr Morrison! Come in, will you. We're just going to have supper.

She returns to the room, followed by MORRISON.

JENNY shuts the street-door, and also returns to the room, closing the door leading to the passage after her.

This is my mother-in-law [*introducing them.*]
Mr Morrison.

MR MORRISON. Pleased to meet you! Hope you're quite well.

MRS CLEGG. I'm very well, thanks. I hope you are too.

MR MORRISON. Yes, thanks.

JANE CLEGG. Johnnie, bring a chair for Mr Morrison!

JOHNNIE. Yes, mother.

MR MORRISON. Oh, please don't trouble.

JOHNNIE *brings a chair forward.*

JANE CLEGG. Won't you take off your coat ?
Let me take your hat !

MR MORRISON. Oh, no, thanks.

JANE CLEGG. Perhaps you'll have some supper
with us.

MR MORRISON. No, I won't have anything,
thanks. Is Clegg at home ?

JANE CLEGG. No, he hasn't come in yet.

MR MORRISON. Oh ! I wanted to see him
particularly.

JANE CLEGG. He ought to be here by now.
What time did he leave the office ?

MR MORRISON. He hasn't been to-day.

JANE CLEGG. Hasn't been ! . . .

MRS CLEGG. Why 'e left 'smornin' same time's
usual.

JANE CLEGG. You're sure he hasn't been.

MR MORRISON. I've only just left, and he
hadn't arrived then. The gov'nor sent me round
to make enquiries about him.

JANE CLEGG. But how odd !

MRS CLEGG. I do 'ope nothink 'asn't 'appened
to 'im.

MR MORRISON. [*endeavouring to be consolatory.*]
Oh, I don't suppose so. He's probably all right.

JANE CLEGG. He said he'd be at the office the whole of the morning! . . . [*to the children.*] You'd better have your supper, now, and go to bed.

JENNY. Oh, please, mother, let me stay up a little longer.

JANE CLEGG. Come along. [*She goes to the table and prepares the children's food.*]

JOHNNIE. Can't I read some of the "History of the Steam Engine," mother?

JENNY. Yes, please, mother.

JANE CLEGG. No, you must have your supper. Sit down, both of you. [*The children begin their meal.*]

MRS CLEGG. Ah, you're very anxious to hear about the steam engine, now, my lady, but you wasn't so anxious a minute or two ago.

JENNY. [*her mouth full.*] Oh, I was, grannie!

MRS CLEGG. Now, there's a wicked story for you. [*to MR MORRISON.*] What do you think of a little girl that doesn't tell the truth, Mr Morrison?

MR MORRISON. [*with heavy jocularly.*] Oh, but nice little girls don't tell fibs, do they?

JENNY. I didn't tell fibs, and I only wanted . . .

JANE CLEGG. [*sharply.*] Eat your supper, Jenny, quickly.

JENNY. [*reproachfully.*] Mother!

JANE CLEGG. [*to MR MORRISON.*] Something must have happened to him. Have you made any enquiries? He may have been run over.

MR MORRISON. No, I shouldn't think that. I expect he's all right.

JANE CLEGG. But why should you think that? You don't know.

MR MORRISON. No, of course, I don't know, but I should think he's probably all right.

JANE CLEGG. I'll go and enquire at the police-station. They may have some information about him there.

MRS CLEGG. I'm sure I 'ope nothink 'asn't 'appened to 'im. I do 'ate accidents.

MR MORRISON. I don't think I should go if I were you, Mrs Clegg.

JANE CLEGG. Why? [*She looks at him for a moment as if she understands what is in his mind.*] Mr Morrison, you! . . . [*She turns to the children.*] Have you finished your supper yet?

JOHNNIE. Oh, no, mother, not nearly.

JANE CLEGG. Well, you must go to bed now.

JENNY. Oh, mother!

JANE CLEGG. Yes, run along! You can finish your supper in bed.

JOHNNIE. Can't we have it here ?

JANE CLEGG. No, Mr Morrison has something to say to us, so you must run along. You can pretend you're having a picnic or something.

JENNY. Oh, yes, Johnnie, let's !

JOHNNIE. Can I read the "History of the Steam Engine" for a little while in bed ?

JANE CLEGG. Yes, but only for a little while. Promise.

JOHNNIE. I promise, mother.

JANE CLEGG. [*bending down and kissing him.*] That's a good boy. Run along now, and take your supper with you. Say good-night to grannie and Mr Morrison. Come along, Jenny.

JOHNNIE. Good-night, Mr Morrison.

MR MORRISON. [*in a manner of a man unaccustomed to children*]. Oh ! Ah ! Good-night !

JOHNNIE. [*going to his grandmother.*] Good-night, grannie.

MRS CLEGG. Good-night, my dear ! [*She kisses him.*]

He collects his book and his supper.

JENNY. [*holding up her face to MR MORRISON to be kissed.*] Good-night, Mr Morrison.

MRS CLEGG. Oh, oh, oh, There's a forward young woman for you.

MR MORRISON. [*kissing JENNY in some embarrassment.*] Good-night, Jenny.

MRS CLEGG. You're a one, you are. Settin' your cap at the gentleman like that.

JENNY. What's setting your cap, grannie? [*She climbs on to MRS CLEGG'S knee, and hugs her tightly.*]

MRS CLEGG. You don't need to be told, you young rogue. [*Hugs the child.*] Good-night, my dear. Um, um, um, um! Good-night, bless you!

JENNY. Good-night, dear grannie.

JANE CLEGG. Come and get your supper, dear. Good-night, Johnnie. [*She bends down and kisses him.*]

JOHNNIE. Good-night, mother! [*He goes into the passage.*]

JENNY. [*carrying her supper.*] Good-night, mother!

JANE CLEGG. Good-night, my darling. [*Kisses her affectionately.*]

JENNY. Good-night, all!

MR MORRISON. Oh, ah, good-night!

MRS CLEGG. Good-night, my sweet'art!

JENNY. Come to bed soon, grannie.

MRS CLEGG. All right, my dearie.

JANE CLEGG. Run along now, Jenny.

JENNY. All right, mother! [*She goes into*

the passage, and then returns to the room.] Oh, can Johnnie read a story to me mother, a *real* story! . . .

JOHNNIE. [*from the stairs.*] No, I want to read about the steam engine.

JENNY. You shut up!

JANE CLEGG. Jenny, Jenny! You must go to bed. Johnnie'll read his book to you, and if you don't want to hear it you can go to sleep.

JENNY. Oh, mother! [*She goes slowly to the foot of the stairs.*] 'Night, all!

JANE CLEGG. Good-night, dear.

JENNY. [*to JOHNNIE.*] Beast, beast!

She runs up the stairs after him.

JANE CLEGG. Now, now!

There is a scuffle, and then a shout of laughter.

JANE CLEGG *listens for a moment, and then shuts the door.*

MRS CLEGG. She's a caution that child is. Just like 'er father was at 'er age, bless 'er.

MR MORRISON. She must liven up the house!

MRS CLEGG. She does indeed.

JANE CLEGG. Mr Morrison, you know something about my husband!

MR MORRISON. [*startled.*] Oh, no, Mrs Clegg; that is to say, I've really come to find out! . . .

JANE CLEGG. What is it?

MR MORRISON. Well, the truth of the matter is, I'm afraid—mind you, I don't know! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Yes!

MRS CLEGG. Is there anything wrong?

MR MORRISON. I'm afraid Clegg may have made a mistake. Of course, I don't know. That's why I came round, just to find out.

MRS CLEGG. Mistake! Wot mistake!

JANE CLEGG. What kind of a mistake, Mr Morrison?

MR MORRISON. Well, you see, a cheque! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Yes?

MR MORRISON. Of course, it may be a mistake, as I say, only it's odd.

MRS CLEGG. I dunno wot you're talkin' about.

JANE CLEGG. Go on, Mr Morrison, explain it all, please.

MR MORRISON. Well, you see a firm that owes us some money, rather a big amount, sent the cheque in after a lot of bother, and it appears they made it payable to Clegg and sent it to him at the office two or three days ago.

JANE CLEGG. Yes.

MRS CLEGG. Yes, that's right. A boy brought the letter 'ere. I saw 'Enry openin' the letter meself. It was a cheque all right. You needn't be alarmed, Mr Morrison. 'Enry'll 'ave it safe!

MR MORRISON. That's just the point, Mrs Clegg. You see he didn't say anything about it. I'm cashier. He ought to have told me. I sent a reminder to the firm, and last night they telephoned through to say they'd sent it, and explained what had happened. Of course, I thought it was odd Clegg hadn't said anything, or given me the cheque, only I thought he'd forgotten it, and I meant to ask him about it this morning. But he never turned up.

MRS CLEGG. Well ?

MR MORRISON. [*very embarrassed.*] Well !
[*laughing nervously.*] It's funny, isn't it ?

MRS CLEGG. I don't see the joke myself. Of course, 'Enry's forgot about it. It'll be all right. You put yourself to a lot of trouble, sir, for nothink wot I can see of it.

MR MORRISON. I'm sure I hope so.

MRS CLEGG. 'Ope so ! Of course you 'ave. 'Ere, Jane, let's 'ave supper. I'm starvin', and I expect 'Enry'll be late again.

JANE CLEGG. You have something, mother. I'll wait for Henry.

MRS CLEGG. [*Rising and going to the table.*] You look quite upset. Anyone 'ud think you believed 'Enry'd took the money.

JANE CLEGG. [*wearily.*] I don't know! . . .

MRS CLEGG. [*angrily.*] Don't know! But you ought to know. 'E's your 'usban'. If the 'ole world believed 'im guilty, you oughtn't. It isn't nice of you. Besides, anyone with any sense 'ud know 'Enry wouldn't do such a thing. I know 'e was always one for goin' on, but 'e never done nothink wrong, not really wrong, I mean, like stealing money or anythink. [*She leans over to JANE and pats her hands.*] There, there, see! 'E'll explain it all right.

MR MORRISON. I hope so.

MRS CLEGG. You seem to 'ave made up your mind already Mr Morrison. Jane, why don't you say somethink. 'Owever you can sit there an' 'ear your 'usban's good name took away, I don't know!

JANE CLEGG. How much is it, Mr Morrison?

MR MORRISON. I don't know quite. There's this cheque for one hundred and forty pounds, but there may be more.

MRS CLEGG. 'Ow can you say such things.

JANE CLEGG. Of course, Mr Morrison, if what you say is true, the money will be repaid.

MRS CLEGG. Of course, it will. I dessay 'Enry didn't mean to take the money, that is if 'e did take it, which I don't believe, not really

take it, I mean, but if 'e did, *if* mind you, of course it'll be paid. 'E'd be the first to say that 'imself. 'Enry never done nothink under'and, not really under'and.

MR MORRISON. [*to JANE CLEGG.*] You see, Mrs Clegg, all our staff is insured against accidents of this sort, and the difficulty is that the policy contains a clause to the effect that the defaulter must be prosecuted and convicted before the insurance company pays up, otherwise there's no proof of embezzlement.

MRS CLEGG. I've always 'eard them insurance companies was tricky.

MR MORRISON. Of course, if the money is paid back, the insurance company won't want to prosecute. In fact, I don't suppose the gov'nor'll say anything about it. As a matter of fact, he doesn't know yet. I'm the only one that knows.

MRS CLEGG. Well, that's fortunate, any'ow. Isn't it, Jane? It's lucky it 'appened just now, if it 'as 'appened. Jane'll be able to pay it all back as easy as anythink. You see 'er uncle died a little while back an' left 'er seven 'undred poun's. Jus' convenient, I call it.

MR MORRISON. Very.

JANE CLEGG. If my husband has defaulted,

Mr Morrison, I shall let you have the money immediately.

MR MORRISON. I'm very glad, Mrs Clegg. I'm sorry it should have happened. Clegg and I have worked together a good many years now. I shouldn't like to think ! . . .

JANE CLEGG. I suppose, Mr Morrison, if the money is repaid instantly, there is no reason why the story should be repeated to anyone else.

MR MORRISON. Well, it's rather hard to decide. The gov'nor ought to know. It's hardly fair to him. Supposing it was to happen again.

MRS CLEGG. It won't 'appen again. We don't know that it's 'appened at all. We on'y got your word for it, an' you might 'ave made a mistake. You ain't the Lord God Almighty.

MR MORRISON. [*on his dignity.*] I know that, Mrs Clegg. You're not treating me with much consideration, I must say. There was no obligation on my part to come here at all to-night. I only did so because I'm a friend of Clegg's. If I hadn't been, I should have gone straight to the gov'nor and told him what's happened. Seems to me I'm getting very little thanks ! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Oh, please, Mr Morrison, don't

say that. You know Mrs Clegg is an old woman, and Henry's her only son! . . .

MR MORRISON. Of course, I make allowances.

MRS CLEGG. 'E's a good son, too. There isn't a cleverer man in this town. I dessay some people's jealous of him.

The noise of a key turning in a lock is heard, and then the street door is opened and shut.

JANE CLEGG. That must be Henry, now. [She opens the door of the sitting-room, and looks into the hall.] Is that you, Henry?

HENRY CLEGG. [from the hall.] Yes, dear. I'm sorry I'm late. I've been frightfully rushed at the office to-day.

He appears at the door and is about to kiss her when he observes MORRISON. He starts violently, then recovers himself a little and smiles feebly.

Hilloa, Morrison, old chap! What are you doing here!

MR MORRISON. I've just been explaining my visit to Mrs Clegg.

HENRY CLEGG. [nervously.] Oh, yes. [He goes to the table.] Is this my supper?

JANE CLEGG. Yes.

HENRY CLEGG. [sitting down.] Will you join me, Morrison?

MR MORRISON. No, thanks. I've had my meal.

HENRY CLEGG. Have a glass of beer?

MR MORRISON. No, thanks.

HENRY CLEGG. I say, what's up with you all? You look mighty solemn.

MRS CLEGG. 'E says you bin stealin' the firm's money.

HENRY CLEGG. [*starting up.*] What!

JANE CLEGG. Mr Morrison is worried about that cheque from Armstrong & Brown. He says you haven't given it to him yet.

MR MORRISON. Of course, it may be a mistake.

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, that! That's all right, old chap, that's all right.

MRS CLEGG. I tole you 'e could explain it when 'e come 'ome. Nasty minds some people must 'ave.

MR MORRISON. You've had the cheque three days now, and I ought to have had it the day you received it. It ought not to have been sent to you at all. They telephoned this morning about it.

HENRY CLEGG. Clean forgot all about it.

MR MORRISON. Funny sort of thing to forget!

MRS CLEGG. Anyone might forget a thing. You don't remember everythink, do you?

MR MORRISON. I don't know what the governor'd say if he knew.

JANE CLEGG. You'd better give the cheque to Mr Morrison now, Henry.

HENRY CLEGG. Eh ?

JANE CLEGG. You said you'd forgotten about it, so I suppose you still have it.

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, yes, yes. That'll be all right, Morrison. I'll clear it up to-morrow. I'm a bit tired to-night.

JANE CLEGG. It doesn't require much effort to take a cheque out of your pocket and pass it over to Mr Morrison.

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, all right, all right. [*He begins to bluster.*] I must say it's a nice thing when a man comes home fagged to find his friend and his wife getting up a tale ! . . .

MR MORRISON. [*with asperity.*] I haven't got up any tale. You haven't accounted for a cheque that ought to have been given to me three days ago, and it's my duty to find out why you haven't accounted for it.

JANE CLEGG. Besides, the whole thing can be cleared up by your passing the cheque over to Mr Morrison.

MRS CLEGG. Jane, you 'aven't got no feelin's. 'E's tired, isn't 'e ? [*She goes to CLEGG's side,*

and puts her arms round his neck.] My poor lad, you're worried to death by 'em.

HENRY CLEGG. [*roughly pushing her away.*] For God's sake leave me alone. As if I hadn't got enough on my mind, without you messing about.

MRS CLEGG. [*a little tearfully.*] Oh, 'Enry, an' me your own mother, too.

MR MORRISON. Why didn't you come in to-day?

JANE CLEGG. You told me when you came in that you'd been busy at the office.

HENRY CLEGG. Did I say that? Not at the office. I have been busy, very busy. Fact is, I met a friend of mine in the town to-day and he put me on to a good bit of business. I've been running all over the place after it. Haven't had time to get anything to eat.

MRS CLEGG. [*dolefully.*] Oh, 'Enry, an' you know you 'ave indigestion.

HENRY CLEGG. I think I've pulled it off all-right. Fine connection.

MR MORRISON. Oh, yes.

JANE CLEGG. Who was it you met?

HENRY CLEGG. No one you know. [*to MORRISON.*] Sure, you won't have something to eat, old chap.

MR MORRISON. Quite sure, thanks.

HENRY CLEGG. Well, you won't mind if I go on, will you? I'm as hungry as a trooper.

MRS CLEGG. Jane, look after 'im do. Wot with workin' so hard, an' bein' upset, I wonder 'e's able to eat at all.

JANE CLEGG. Don't you think you'd better let Mr Morrison have the cheque, Henry. It's hardly fair to keep him here so long. He probably has other things to do.

HENRY CLEGG. I can't let him have it to-night. I left my bag in the cloak-room at the station. I didn't want to be bothered with it when I went after this chap I've just been telling you about, and I was too tired to go and get it again to-night. I'll fetch it with me in the morning. [*airily.*] It's all right, Morrison, there's no necessity to look as if I'd committed a crime.

JANE CLEGG. [*with cold precision.*] You didn't take your bag with you this morning.

MRS CLEGG. Jane, 'ow can you doubt your own 'usban'!

JANE CLEGG. You didn't take your bag this morning. It's still upstairs.

MR MORRISON. I must say I don't like the look of this.

MRS CLEGG. Well, p'raps 'e thought 'e took it. If the bag's upstairs, the cheque'll be there, too. Run up an' get it, Jane, there's a dear, an' then we'll be at peace again.

JANE CLEGG. Shall I go and get it, Henry, or will you ?

HENRY CLEGG. Eh ? Oh ! . [*He stops short, and glances sharply about him. There is silence for a few moments.*] I may as well own up. I haven't got the cheque.

MRS CLEGG. Oh, 'Enry !

HENRY CLEGG. I've cashed it.

There is silence again for a little while.

MR MORRISON. Of course, you know, this is very serious.

JANE CLEGG. [*quickly.*] Mr Morrison, you will remember your promise not to say anything about this to Mr Harper. The money will be paid to-morrow. I'll see to that.

MR MORRISON. I didn't make any promise, Mrs Clegg. It's my duty to tell Mr Harper. This may not be the only sum ! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. It is.

MR MORRISON. And it may happen again. I must tell him, Mrs Clegg.

MRS CLEGG. But 'e'll lose 'is situation, if you do.

MR MORRISON. I'm sorry. As I said, we've worked together a good many years, but I must do my duty.

MRS CLEGG. You wouldn't see 'im disgraced, would you? Oh, Mr Morrison, don't go an' do it! Think of 'is wife an' children. An' me, too. [*She weeps while she speaks.*] I've lived 'ere all me life, an' no one 'as never bin able to say a word agin me, not no one. I've always kept meself respectable, wotever's 'appened, an' now! [*to her son.*] Oh, 'Enry, tell 'im it ain't true. I'm a nole woman, an' I couldn't bear to die thinkin' you was in prison!

HENRY CLEGG. Prison?

MRS CLEGG. 'E says you'll be put in prison for this.

MR MORRISON. Not if the money is repaid.

JANE CLEGG. It will be repaid. [*She goes to MRS CLEGG.*] It will be all right, mother. The money will be paid. Mr Morrison, must you tell Mr Harper?

MR MORRISON. I'm afraid so, Mrs Clegg. I can't help it.

MRS CLEGG. You can 'elp anythink if you want to!

MR MORRISON. I've got myself to think of,

and if the gov'nor found out ! And there's the future. It might happen again.

JANE CLEGG. Mr Morrison, will you agree to this ? Henry will resign his post with Mr Harper, and we'll leave the town ! . . .

MRS CLEGG. Oh, no ! . . .

JANE CLEGG. We'll go to Canada or somewhere, where we can start afresh. The money shall be paid, and you shan't have any anxiety about the future. Will you agree to say nothing to Mr Harper, if we do that ?

MR MORRISON. I don't want to appear hard !

JANE CLEGG. Please, Mr Morrison. You see, it isn't only Henry. There's Johnnie and Jenny.

MR MORRISON. Yes, I see that, of course.

JANE CLEGG. I'd planned things for them, but ! . . . Oh, well, it can't be helped. You won't speak to Mr Harper about this, will you ?

MR MORRISON. [*after a short pause.*] All right, Mrs Clegg, I won't !

JANE CLEGG. You'd better come here to-morrow evening for the money, hadn't you ? It might look odd if I were to come to the office with a lot of money.

MR MORRISON. Perhaps you're right. Very well, I'll come in just before tea. Will that do ?

JANE CLEGG. Yes.

MR MORRISON. Well, I better be going now. I'm glad that's over. [*He holds out his hand to JANE.*] Good-night, Mrs Clegg. I'm sorry to have brought you bad news.

JANE CLEGG. You couldn't help it, and it was better that you should have brought it than anyone else.

MR MORRISON. [*going to MRS CLEGG.*] That's true. Good-night ma'am!

MRS CLEGG. [*feebly.*] Good-night, sir.

MR MORRISON. Good-night, Clegg.

CLEGG rises from his chair, and holds out his hand, which MORRISON ignores.

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, good-night, old chap.

MR MORRISON. [*to JANE.*] Don't trouble to come to the door, Mrs Clegg. I'll let myself out.

JANE CLEGG. It's all right.

MORRISON and she go out into the passage. She opens the door for him and lets him out.

MRS CLEGG sits at the fire, snivelling. HENRY CLEGG moodily eats his supper. JANE CLEGG returns to the room, shutting the door after her.

It's turned colder, I think.

Neither HENRY CLEGG nor his mother respond. JANE CLEGG draws her chair up to the fire. She sits thinking for a few minutes.

MRS CLEGG. Aren't you goin' to 'ave your supper, Jane ?

JANE CLEGG. I don't feel like eating, thanks !

HENRY CLEGG. [*sullenly.*] No good making a martyr of yourself.

JANE CLEGG. Henry !

HENRY CLEGG. Well ?

JANE CLEGG. What did you do with the money ?

HENRY CLEGG. I spent it.

MRS CLEGG. [*horror-stricken.*] You spent it !

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, don't sit there looking like a damned fool. I spent it, that's all.

MRS CLEGG. Oh, wot disgrace to 'appen. [*She becomes inarticulate.*]

JANE CLEGG. What did you do with it ?

HENRY CLEGG. [*blustering.*] God bless my soul, am I not to have any peace ? I'm fagged out ! . . .

JANE CLEGG. I must know what you did with it. I have a right to know. What did you do with it ?

HENRY CLEGG. I dunno. One thing and another.

JANE CLEGG. You must know. You've only had it a few days.

MRS CLEGG. Such a thing's never been known in our family before.

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, shut up, you! Sitting there, snivelling!

JANE CLEGG. What did you do with the money, Henry?

HENRY CLEGG. I tell you I spent it!

JANE CLEGG. You've told so many lies to-night! . . .

MRS CLEGG. [*reproachfully.*] 'E's your 'usban', Jane!

JANE CLEGG. If I'm to repay the money he stole, I must know what he did with it.

HENRY CLEGG. All right. Look here, Jane, you'll see me through this, won't you? They *could* put me in jail, you know. . . . I couldn't stand that! It's Harper's own fault, blast him!

MRS CLEGG. I knoo it was someone's fault!

HENRY CLEGG. [*to JANE.*] It was like this, you see! You know when they put me on that new round?

JANE CLEGG. Yes.

HENRY CLEGG. Well, it's an expensive round to work. You have to treat these damned shop-keepers like lords before they'll give you an order. And I'm only allowed a pound a week for expenses. I've spent that in a day. Of course,

I didn't tell you. I didn't want to upset you, and I thought I should pull round all right. So I should, only for the bad debts. It was that did it. A man went smash and hadn't paid a sou to us, and so old Harper made me responsible for the whole bally lot. He's like that, the old screw. Makes his travellers bear the bad debts. That was how it began. I tried to make it up by horse-racing. You know! Oh, it's a mug's game, I know that, but we're all mugs when we're in a hole. I was in a rotten hole, too. That fellow Munce who came in here the other night, he's a bookie. He was worrying me for money I owed him, and you wouldn't let me have any . . .

MRS CLEGG. I knoo you was doin' wrong in not lettin' 'im 'ave it.

HENRY CLEGG. And then that cheque came. I didn't mean to take it really. It just came into my head. I thought I'd be able to make it up somehow.

JANE CLEGG. Why didn't you tell me about the bad debts?

HENRY CLEGG. What would have been the good? It was before your uncle left you that money.

JANE CLEGG. Why didn't you tell me then?

HENRY CLEGG. I'd started betting then, and I wasn't exactly proud of myself.

MRS CLEGG. Jus' like 'is poor father was. 'E was proud, too.

HENRY CLEGG. Besides, I thought you'd be sure to let me have the money or some of it. It seemed natural somehow.

MRS CLEGG. Any nice woman would 'ave let you 'ave it.

JANE CLEGG. It would have been better to have told me than to let Morrison find out. You'll have to leave Mr Harper, now! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. I suppose so.

MRS CLEGG. Oh, what a good job it was your uncle Tom died when 'e did, Jane, It was jus' like the 'and of Providence. You'll be able to make some use of that money, now, 'stead of 'oardin' it up.

JANE CLEGG. Yes, that's true. Only it wasn't the kind of use I wanted to make of it.

MRS CLEGG. What better use could you make of it than to save your 'usban's good name?

JANE CLEGG. [*beginning to clear away the remnants of the meal.*] Yes, I suppose that's a great privilege.

HENRY CLEGG. [*rising from his seat, and taking the plates from her.*] Here, let me do that. You

sit down, and take it easy for a bit. [*He puts the plates down and pushes her into a chair.*] You've had a rotten day of it. [*He puts his arms about her and kisses her.*] You're a jolly good sort, Jane. You are, straight.

JANE CLEGG. [*getting up from her chair, and proceeding with the work of clearing away.*] Yes.

CLEGG looks for his pipe, which he lights.
He takes the chair which his wife has just vacated.

Don't you think we'd better go to bed. It's getting late.

MRS CLEGG. Yes, I think so, too. I'm goin' any'ow. [*She rises and goes to her son, whom she fondles.*] Goo'-night, my dear, an' don't worry your 'ead about nothink. Jane'll see it's all right.

HENRY CLEGG. Good-night, mother.

MRS CLEGG. [*going to JANE.*] Goo'-night, Jane. You've bin a good wife to 'im.

JANE CLEGG. [*indifferently.*] Good-night, mother.

The two women kiss, and MRS CLEGG goes out of the room. There is quiet for a while. JANE takes the dishes out of the room. CLEGG stands with his back to the fire, watching her. JANE returns to the room,

looking dubious. HENRY *glances up at her quickly.*

HENRY CLEGG. What are you thinking about, Jane ?

JANE CLEGG. Oh, I wish I could be sure of you, Henry !

HENRY CLEGG. Well, you are, aren't you ?

JANE CLEGG. I don't know. Oh, yes, I suppose so. Come on, let's go to bed. [*She gathers up her sewing and moves towards the door.*] Turn out the lamp, will you ?

HENRY CLEGG. Yes, dear. [*He turns out the light. JANE stands in the doorway.*] Don't be hard on me, Jane. I'm not really a bad chap. I'm only weak. That's all.

JANE CLEGG. I can't help thinking of that woman, Henry.

HENRY CLEGG. [*putting his arms about her.*] You needn't, dear. I swear to God I've not done anything against you. I promised you ! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Yes, you promised ! . . .

She goes towards the stairs, and he follows, closing the door after him.

ACT III

It is the next evening. MRS CLEGG and JANE CLEGG are sitting by the fire. The door leading to the hall is ajar.

MRS CLEGG. It's a good job 'Enry was 'ere. Johnnie and Jenny wouldn't 'ave gone to bed so quiet as they did.

JANE CLEGG. [*without looking up.*] No.

MRS CLEGG. I do 'ope they'll never get to 'ear about this. Such disgrace! Though I must say it serves Mr 'Arper right. I 'aven't no sympathy for 'im. 'E didden treat 'Enry fair, makin' 'im pay all them bad debts an' all.

JANE CLEGG. It doesn't seem quite fair.

MRS CLEGG. Poor 'Enry! I expec' 'e felt it, you know. Bound to 'ave. 'E's that sensitive. 'Ighly-strung! I dessay 'e worried about it, on'y 'e wouldn't say nothink.

JANE CLEGG. Perhaps he did.

MRS CLEGG. You know, I wonder 'e didden give it away in 'is sleep. Talk about it! I've always 'eard that people with things on their

mind dreams somethink 'orrible, an' begins talkin' in their sleep, an' their wives gets to 'ear about it.

JANE CLEGG. I don't suppose that always happens. Henry never revealed anything in his sleep.

MRS CLEGG. P'raps you was asleep an' didden 'ear. 'Is father uset to do it, but I never could make 'ead or tail out o' wot 'e said.

HENRY CLEGG *comes down the stairs as she speaks, and enters the room.*

JANE CLEGG. Are they asleep, Henry?

HENRY CLEGG. [*coming between his mother and wife, and sitting down.*] Yes. Jenny took a long time to go off. Young beggar. Wanted me to tell stories to her all night.

MRS CLEGG. Bless 'er!

They sit in silence for a few moments.

MRS CLEGG. 'Ave you thought of wot you'll do when this . . . bother's over, 'Enry?

HENRY CLEGG. Not yet, mother.

JANE CLEGG. We shall leave here, of course. We'll start afresh in Canada.

MRS CLEGG. It's an awful long way to Canada. I don't know anyone there! . . .

JANE CLEGG. That's why we shall go. Oh, mother, can't you see, it's bound to come out

that Henry took the money. Men don't leave their jobs suddenly without good cause; and how are we to know that Mr Morrison won't tell people why Henry left Mr Harper. He might tell without meaning to. Something might be said that would start suspicion in people's minds, and then! . . . Oh, it would be awful for Johnnie and Jenny.

HENRY CLEGG. It's all Johnnie and Jenny with you! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Yes, it is, Henry. You must get used to that. [*to MRS CLEGG.*] People are not likely to suspect anything if we go to Canada. Henry can tell his friends that he's tired of England. . . . It's easy enough to say that! . . .

MRS CLEGG. I dessay you're right; but it's 'ard at my age to 'ave to go abroad. I'm a nole woman! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. Yes, mother, we know that. We can't help it. Do for goodness sake stop whining about it.

MRS CLEGG. [*tearfully.*] That isn't the way to speak to your mother, 'Enry!

HENRY CLEGG. No, but you make me talk like it. Nothing but snivelling all day. If we've got to go, we've got to go, and there's an

end of it. Jane has all the money, and she's boss here. We've got to do what she tells us.

MRS CLEGG. It's not right. It's unnatcherl.

HENRY CLEGG. [*getting up and pacing the room.*] All right! You've said that before. If you don't want to go to Canada, dam it, stay behind.

JANE CLEGG. [*gently.*] Henry!

HENRY CLEGG. Well, it's sickening, isn't it. I can't see any sense in crying over spilt milk.

MRS CLEGG. You didden ought to 'ave spilt no milk! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, for God's sake, shut up! If I'm to have the thing cast up to me for the rest of my life, I might as well go and drown myself.

MRS CLEGG. Oh, 'Enry! [*She rises from her seat and goes to him.*] I didden mean to cast nothink up at you, 'Enry. I didden reely. [*She puts her arms round him and draws his head down and kisses him.*] You're my son, 'Enry, all I got. . . . I love you, 'Enry! . . . [*She weeps helplessly and buries her face on his breast.*]

HENRY CLEGG. [*patting her affectionately.*] All right, mother. I'm sorry I was snappy. Here, come and sit down. [*He leads her back to her seat.*] You'll be all right in Canada. [*He*

makes her sit down.] We'll have you searching for gold at Klondyke in no time. [*There is a knock at the street door.*] I suppose that's Morrison! Buck up, mother, we can't have him seeing you in tears.

MRS CLEGG. Awright, 'Enry, dear. I won't cry no more.

JANE CLEGG. You open the door, Henry.

HENRY CLEGG. Right. [*He goes into the hall and opens the street door. MORRISON is seen standing in the street.*] Oh, is that you, Morrison! Come in!

MR MORRISON. [*stepping inside.*] Thanks.

HENRY CLEGG. Leave your hat here, will you?

MR MORRISON. [*hanging his hat on the hat-stand.*] Thanks. I'm not too soon, am I?

HENRY CLEGG. No, oh no! You're just right. Come in!

They enter the sitting room. HENRY CLEGG shuts the door while MORRISON greets MRS CLEGG and JANE CLEGG.

[*putting a chair for MORRISON.*]. Have this chair, will you?

MR MORRISON. [*sitting down.*] Thanks. It's a nice night, isn't it?

HENRY CLEGG. Yes, I thought we were going to have some rain, but it's kept fine.

MR MORRISON. Yes. We don't want any more rain just yet, do we ?

MRS CLEGG. There's been a lot of rain lately. I expect it's good for some people, farmers and people like that. I must say I don't like it. I always get the rheumatism that bad.

MR MORRISON. They do say that a man that's had his leg off can always tell when it's going to rain.

MRS CLEGG. Indeed !

MR MORRISON. Yes. He gets a funny feeling in the stump—sort of pins and needles.

HENRY CLEGG. That's funny, that is. You'd wonder why that was.

MRS CLEGG. I expect it 'as a meaning, if we on'y knoo it. There's nothink without a meanin'. I've always said that, an' I believe it.

JANE CLEGG. Hadn't we better settle Mr Morrison's business, Henry ? I expect he's anxious to get away.

MR MORRISON. Oh, I'm in no hurry, Mrs Clegg ! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. Did the guv'nor ask where I was to-day ?

MR MORRISON. Well, you see, I told him the whole facts ! . . .

MRS CLEGG. You tole Mr 'Arper! Oh, but you promised you wouldn't.

JANE CLEGG. It doesn't make much difference. It was bound to come out. . . .

HENRY CLEGG. I think you might have kept it to yourself, Morrison.

MR MORRISON. I daresay you do, but I've got myself to think of. Supposing there'd been a hitch in this affair, where'd I be, eh? The guv'nor was almost sure to find it out, and if he found I'd kept it from him, he might have thought I was in it, too. I've always kept *my* hands clean! . . .

MRS CLEGG. You better touch wood, Mr Morrison. You don't know 'ow soon it'll be before you get into trouble.

MR MORRISON. I'm not that sort. I don't get into trouble. Trouble doesn't come to you; you go to it. That's my belief.

JANE CLEGG. You're a fortunate man, Mr Morrison. I hope you will always be able to believe that.

MR MORRISON. I expect I shall.

HENRY CLEGG. What did the guv'nor say?

MR MORRISON. He was furious at first. Stormed and raged, and threatened to send for the police at once. You know the way he goes

on when he's in a temper. I let him go for a while, and then told him of the arrangement I'd made with Mrs Clegg that the money should be repaid, and that soothed him down. I told him it would be silly to send for the police! . . .

MRS CLEGG. Oh, thank you, Mr Morrison, thank you!

MR MORRISON. Because, of course, he might not get the money. That's what I told him. Of course, he'd have got it all right. The insurance company would have paid, if you hadn't, and they'd have been glad enough to get their money back somehow.

MRS CLEGG. Mr 'Arper is more to blame than 'Enry. That's wot I think.

MR MORRISON. Well, of course, that's one way of looking at it.

MRS CLEGG. It's the only way to look at it. If 'e 'adn't . . .

HENRY CLEGG. All right, mother. Morrison doesn't want to hear your views on Mr Harper. Jane, we'd better settle this, hadn't we? Have you got the money?

JANE CLEGG. Yes. It's upstairs. I'll go and fetch it. It's in notes, Mr Morrison. I thought that would be more convenient.

MR MORRISON. Yes, that was the best thing to do, Mrs Clegg.

JANE CLEGG *goes out and is seen to mount the stairs.*

MRS CLEGG. I do think Mr 'Arper ought to 'ave come 'ere 'imself for the money.

MR MORRISON. Oh!

MRS CLEGG. 'Ow do we know it'll be all right! . . .

MR MORRISON. Do you mean to suggest that I might steal the money? . . .

MRS CLEGG. I don't mean to suggest anythink, but I believe in bein' on the safe side.

MR MORRISON. [*hotly.*] Everyone isn't like your son, you know.

HENRY CLEGG. [*angrily.*] You needn't put on the virtuous air, Morrison! . . .

MR MORRISON. I'm not putting on any virtuous air. I've tried to make things as pleasant for you as possible, and I get nothing but insults from your mother. You'd think to hear her that I'd stolen the money, not you. . . . I've always kept *my* hands clean. There's nothing in my life I'd be ashamed to let anyone know about.

MRS CLEGG. Well, you ain't yooman, then!

I tell you this, Mr Morrison, I don't believe you. Now!

HENRY CLEGG. Mother, mother!

MRS CLEGG. No, 'Enry, I won't sit 'ere an' 'ear you made little of. 'Ow do we know 'e's any better'n you. We on'y got 'is word for it.

MR MORRISON. I must say! . . .

MRS CLEGG. There's things in everyone's life they don't want to talk about. If it isn't one thing, it's another. That's wot I've learned from bein' alive. It's on'y yooman. Wot 'ud be the use of 'avin' a Merciful Father if 'E' adn't got nothink to be merciful about! That's 'ow I look at it! An' I dessay, Mr Morrison, for all you're so good an' 'oly, you got somethink you don't want to go braggin' about. There's some people does things they're not ashamed of an' ought to be.

JANE CLEGG *returns to the room while MRS CLEGG is speaking.*

HENRY CLEGG. Don't mind her, Morrison; she's a bit upset.

MRS CLEGG. Look at Mr 'Arper!

JANE CLEGG. What's wrong, mother!

MRS CLEGG. It's that Mr Morrison with 'is 'oly airs. 'E never done nothink to be ashamed of, 'e says, an' of course 'e's better'n my 'Enry.

JANE CLEGG. Well, well, mother, what's it matter what anyone thinks about him, if you're satisfied with him.

MRS CLEGG. Now, there's ole 'Arper. Look at 'im. Look 'ow 'e treated 'Enry!

MR MORRISON. If you ask me, Mr Harper treated him jolly well.

MRS CLEGG. Oh, indeed! Indeed! Making 'im pay all the bad debts was treatin' 'im well, I suppose!

HENRY CLEGG. [*agitated.*] Mother, for goodness sake, hold your tongue. [*to MORRISON.*] Don't take any notice of her, old chap. Jane, have you got the money?

MR MORRISON. What bad debts?

MRS CLEGG. You know well enough what bad debts. Don't put on the 'oly an' innocent look to me. I know your sort. It wassen 'is fault they didden pay for wot they ordered!

MR MORRISON. Who didn't pay?

HENRY CLEGG. All right, old chap. Can't you see she's upset.

MR MORRISON. I don't know what she means by bad debts.

MRS CLEGG. Oh, yes, you do. Puttin' 'im on a dear round an' then makin' 'im pay the bad debts!

MR MORRISON. Look here, Mrs Clegg, I've had enough of this, see! I don't know what tale he's been telling you! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. It doesn't matter, old chap, it doesn't matter. Let's get this business settled. Jane! . . .

MR MORRISON. I'm not going to be shut up. [*to* MRS CLEGG.] He's had the best and easiest round of the lot, and he hasn't had a single bad debt for a year past, and those he used to have, the gov'nor bore two-thirds. See! I'm not going to stay here and listen to you abusing the gov'nor for nothing!

JANE CLEGG. He hasn't had a single bad debt! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. It's all right dear. I'll explain it all presently. Let's settle this affair first. Morrison doesn't want to hear our quarrels.

JANE CLEGG. I don't understand. You said you had to pay the bad debts, and that you took the money to make them up.

MR MORRISON. All lies, that's what it is!

MRS CLEGG. Don't you dare to insult my son, you!

JANE CLEGG. Please keep quiet, mother. Henry, is this true?

MR MORRISON. Of course it's true!

JANE CLEGG. I'm speaking to my husband, Mr Morrison. Henry, will you explain? . . .

HENRY CLEGG. It's all right, dear. It's quite simple. I can make it clear in a minute or two, but I prefer to do it when we're alone. I object to discussing private matters before strangers.

JANE CLEGG. No, you must tell me now. It's only fair to Mr Morrison.

MRS CLEGG. Of course, if you accept 'is word to 'Enry's! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. Mother, for the love of God shut up! You've made enough mess already without making it worse.

MRS CLEGG. If a mother can't speak up for 'er son! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Mother, you'd better reconcile yourself to the fact that Henry has been lying again! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. [*blustering.*] This is too much, this is. Look here, Morrison, if you're a gentleman you'll clear out and leave us to settle this matter alone.

MR MORRISON. I haven't had the money yet.

HENRY CLEGG. That'll be all right. You can come to-morrow.

MR MORRISON. I won't go till I get it.

HENRY CLEGG. If you don't want to be thrown out, you'll go now! . . .

JANE CLEGG. That'll do, Henry. Mr Morrison will stay until you've explained the position.

HENRY CLEGG. Then he can stay till he's blue in the face. I won't explain. I'm not going to be bullied by him or by you. I'm a man, not a child.

JANE CLEGG. I shall not pay the money until I hear your explanation.

HENRY CLEGG. I don't care. Keep your dam money. They can do what they like.

JANE CLEGG. Very well. I'm sorry, Mr Morrison. Good-night!

MR MORRISON. This is pretty serious, you know.

JANE CLEGG. I know. Good-night!

HENRY CLEGG. [*still blustering.*] I don't care a damn!

MR MORRISON. I shall go straight to Mr Harper, and tell him what's happened. I shouldn't be surprised if he applies for a warrant at once.

HENRY CLEGG. [*anxiously.*] What, to-night!

MR MORRISON. Yes.

JANE CLEGG. I can't help that.

MRS CLEGG. Oh, Jane, an' 'im your own 'usban'!

MR MORRISON. [*hesitating.*] I don't understand you, Mrs Clegg. After all, he is your husband! . . .

JANE CLEGG. I wonder. I thought I was marrying a man I could trust. Henry's a liar. I can't trust him.

HENRY CLEGG. Go on. Make me out all that's bad.

JANE CLEGG. Henry, why are you talking as if you were being unjustly treated? You know that you have lied to me from first to last. Even now I don't know how you managed to get into debt as you did.

HENRY CLEGG. I've told you. Gambling.

MR MORRISON. Good heavens! A gambler, a liar, and a thief!

MRS CLEGG. It's none of your business.

MR MORRISON. No, thank God.

JANE CLEGG. You just gambled the money away, Henry? Is that so?

HENRY CLEGG. Yes. I said that about the bad debts to make the thing look a bit better than it was. [*He comes up to her.*] Jane, I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I ought to have told you the truth. I know that. But I was ashamed, I was really. Get me out of this scrape, Jane, and I swear I won't give you cause

to complain again. Morrison, you won't tell old Harper to-night, will you? Good God, man, I might be arrested this evening. Jane, you'll get me out of it, won't you. I couldn't stand it. Look here, I swear I'll be a good husband to you, I will. I'll swear it on the Bible, if you like. I didn't mean what I said just now. It was all talk.

JANE CLEGG. I wonder if you're worth saving, Henry!

MRS CLEGG *bursts into tears.*

HENRY CLEGG. I'll make myself worth saving, Jane. I will, I swear I will. [*He tries to kiss her, but she turns away from him.*] Morrison, you say something. Mother.

JANE CLEGG. It isn't necessary, Henry. I'll pay the money.

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, God bless you, Jane. [*He collapses into a chair in something like hysterics.*] I couldn't face prison. [*There is a loud persistent knocking on the door. Starting up in agitation.*] Oh, who's that? [*JANE goes towards the door.*] No, no, don't answer. Morrison, it's all right, isn't it? You haven't told the police.

MR MORRISON. Of course I haven't.

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, my God, I shall go out of my mind! [*The knocking continues.*] Curse

it, who can it be? [JANE goes into the hall, leaving the door open.] If it's anyone for me, Jane, say I'm not in. No, wait a bit! I'll open it.

JANE returns to the room, and CLEGG goes into the hall, shutting the door behind him. The knocking continues.

MR MORRISON. Seems a bit upset, doesn't he?

MRS CLEGG. [tearfully.] You'd be upset if you was 'im. The way you all go for 'im. [There is the sound of a scuffle at the street door, and a loud shouting.] 'Ooever is that?

JANE CLEGG. [opening the door.] What's the matter, Henry?

She opens the door wide, and her husband is seen trying to shut the street door. A voice is heard on the other side of it, shouting, "You let me in, or it'll be the worse for you, see!"

HENRY CLEGG. It's all right, Jane. You go inside, will you?

JANE CLEGG. That's Mr Munce's voice, isn't it?

MUNCE. I'll show you up, you blasted welsher!

He heaves the door open, and stumbles into the hall against HENRY CLEGG.

Keep me out, would you ?

HENRY CLEGG. You've no right ! . . .

JANE CLEGG. What is it, Mr Munce ?

MUNCE. I want my money, that's what it is.

'E promised to let me 'ave it ! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Come in, won't you ?

HENRY CLEGG. No, I can't have you in here to-night. I've got a friend in to see me.

MUNCE. I don't care about your friend. You py me my money !

HENRY CLEGG. I'll settle with you to-morrow.

MUNCE. Yes, I know. I've 'eard that tale before.

JANE CLEGG. What is it, what is it ?

MUNCE. I want my money.

HENRY CLEGG. I tell you, I'll give it to you to-morrow.

JANE CLEGG. Shut the door, Henry. We don't want the neighbours to hear this. Come in, Mr Munce.

JANE CLEGG re-enters the room, and is followed by MUNCE. HENRY CLEGG stands irresolutely at the door, and then closes it, coming back to the room with the others.

MUNCE. I don't want to make no fuss. . . .

[to MRS CLEGG.] Goo-deevnin', ma'am !

HENRY CLEGG. Can't you see we've got a friend here to-night. Nice thing this I must say intruding into people's houses like this.

MUNCE. Can't help 'oo you 'ave 'ere, I must 'ave my money, an' I don't go out of 'ere till I get it, see!

JANE CLEGG. What money, Mr Munce?

MUNCE. What 'e owes me. This long time, 'e does. You ast 'im. Go on, you ast 'im. I waited patient! . . .

JANE CLEGG. But what's it for? Henry! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. All right, dear. You'd better leave this to me. [to MUNCE.] Look here, Munce, it's no good you going on like this. I'll settle up with you the first thing in the morning, I promise you I will.

MUNCE. Yes, I know all about that, but it won't work, see! I want my money now, see! Look 'ere, I treated you fair, didden I?

HENRY CLEGG. Yes, yes, I know, but I've got a friend here now! . . .

MUNCE. Well, you gimme me money an' Ill 'ook it all right!

JANE CLEGG. Mr Munce, will you please tell me how much my husband owes you, and what it is for?

MUNCE. Bets, that's what it's for. I treated 'im fair I 'ave.

JANE CLEGG. Bets!

MUNCE. Yes, you know! 'Orse-racin'! Twenty-five quid!

JANE CLEGG. But I thought . . . Henry, you said you'd taken! . . . Oh, what does it all mean?

MUNCE. It means I want my money, that's what it means. Look 'ere, Mrs Clegg, I'm sorry to upset you or anythink but I must have it, you know, or I'll be up the pole, straight. Look 'ere, you've got a bit by you now. Let 'im 'ave it, so's 'e can py me!

HENRY CLEGG. It's no good you worrying my wife, Munce. I'll come and see you to-morrow.

MR MORRISON. Perhaps, Mrs Clegg, we'd better settle our business first. Then I can leave you with this gentleman.

JANE CLEGG. I'll bring the money in the morning, Mr Morrison!

MR MORRISON. If you don't mind, I'd rather take it with me to-night. You know the old proverb: a bird in the hand is worth! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Very well, Mr Morrison.

MR MORRISON. I'm sorry to appear! . . .

JANE CLEGG. You're quite right, Mr Morrison.

She opens the cash-box and takes out a roll of notes, which she proceeds to count.

MUNCE. No one's more sorry'n I am to make a fuss ! . . .

MRS CLEGG. [*lachrymosely.*] Well, wot you want to come an' make it for ?

MUNCE. You'd make one wouldn't you if you was me. I never failed to make pyment in my life. That's a fact ! There ain't many bookies can sy that. I always paid up when the money was doo ! An' now your son is puttin' me in Queer Street by not^o pyin' me what 'e owes me. Ain't that somethink to make a fuss about, eih ? I got my name . . .

HENRY CLEGG. All right, old chap ! . . .

MUNCE. It ain't all right.

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, shut up ! As soon as my wife has settled with this gentleman, we'll settle your affair too.

MUNCE. An' about time, too.

JANE CLEGG. [*handing the notes to MR MORRISON.*] I think that's right, Mr Morrison. Just count them, will you.

MR MORRISON. [*taking the notes from her.*] Thank you, Mrs Clegg. [*He begins to count them.*] I'd better give you a receipt for the amount, hadn't I ?

JANE CLEGG. Yes, please!

MR MORRISON. [*finishing the counting of the notes.*] Yes, that's quite right. [*He puts the money in his pocket.*] If you can let me have a pen and ink, I'll just write out the receipt.

MUNCE. P'raps you'll let me 'ave my money too, ma'am.

JANE CLEGG. You can wait! . . . [*She puts writing materials before MORRISON, who writes the receipt.*]

MUNCE. What you mean "wait"!

JANE CLEGG. Until this gentleman has finished his business. Then we will discuss yours. Please sit down!

MUNCE. Oh, awright! I don't want to be nasty, on'y I thought when you said "wait" you was playin' about. I'm sure there ain't a more patienter chap'n me anywhere. Now, is there, Clegg? I ask you fair! . . .

MR MORRISON. [*rising and handing the receipt to JANE CLEGG.*] I think that's right, Mrs Clegg.

MUNCE. [*to MR MORRISON.*] You got your whack awright. I wish I'd mine.

MR MORRISON. You have the advantage of me, sir.

MUNCE. Eh?

MR MORRISON. I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance.

MUNCE. Well, it ain't my fault they ain't interdooced us, is it? O' course, if you want to be nasty! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Yes, this will do excellently, Mr Morrison. [*holding out her hand to him.*] Good-night!

MR MORRISON. [*shaking her hand warmly.*] Good-night, Mrs Clegg. I'm more than sorry! . . .

JANE CLEGG. It was not your fault. Good-night.

MR MORRISON. Good-night! [*He glances towards MRS CLEGG.*] Good-night ma'am. [*MRS CLEGG makes no response.*] Good-night, Clegg!

HENRY CLEGG. [*nervously.*] Shall I come to the door with you?

MR MORRISON. Oh, no, thanks. It doesn't matter. I can let myself out. Good-night!

HENRY CLEGG. [*holding out his hand.*] Good-night.

MR MORRISON. [*ignoring CLEGG'S proffered hand.*] Good-night all.

He opens the hall door, closing it after him, and a moment later the noise of the street door being shut is heard.

JANE CLEGG. Now, Mr Munce! . . .

MUNCE. Well, it's like this, Mrs Clegg, I'm not one to turn nasty for nothink. 'E can bear me aht in that. Can't you, Clegg ?

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, you're right enough !

MUNCE. That's true. 'E'll admit it 'isself. But wot I do say is, I ain't been treated fair. Nah, if it 'adden bin for 'safternoon ! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. I say, old man, come to the point. I owe you twenty-five pounds, and you want to be paid. That's the point ! You're only wasting time.

MUNCE. That's right enough, o' course. Yes, that is the point. 'E owes me twenty-five quid, an' I want it. That's the point right enough.

MRS CLEGG. People like you don't deserve to get paid anythink. 'Orse-racin' an' gamblin' an' leading people astray.

MUNCE. I don't suppose you'd refuse to tike the money if you mide a bet wi' me an' won, eih ?

MRS CLEGG. I woulden bet with you or no one, an' I'm sure that 'Enry woulden neither, on'y you persuaded 'im into it.

MUNCE. 'E didden need no persuadin', I give you my word.

HENRY CLEGG. Mother, don't you think you'd better go to bed.

MRS CLEGG. [*weeping profusely.*] I suppose I 'ad. I don't seem able to do nothink right. I done all I could for you. . . . Jane's that 'ard!

HENRY CLEGG. All right, mother.

MRS CLEGG. [*going to her son and putting her arms about him.*] I love you, 'Enry, dear. You're all I got . . . you an' Jenny . . . an' Johnnie, o' course. I'm a nole woman, I know, an' . . . don't go an' do nothink wrong again, will you, dear. I . . . I can't bear to 'ear them sayin' things about you. That Mr Morrison, 'e said things that 'urt me crool. [*She kisses him affectionately.*] I'm very fond of you, 'Enry. You're so like your poor father.

HENRY CLEGG. All right, mother. Go to bed now. All the bother'll be over in the morning.

MRS CLEGG. [*wearily.*] Good-night, my dear.

HENRY CLEGG. Good-night, mother.

He opens the door for her, and she passes out weeping. She stops in the doorway for a moment and says "Good-night, Jane!"

JANE CLEGG. Good-night, mother.

MRS CLEGG. Don't be 'ard on 'im. 'E don't mean nothink.

HENRY CLEGG. Good-night, mother.

MRS CLEGG. Good-night, my dear!

She goes into the hall, and HENRY CLEGG closes the door behind her.

MUNCE. Ole girl seems a bit upset, eih ?

JANE CLEGG. Yes.

MUNCE. Not surprisin', o' course. [*to CLEGG.*] I s'pose you bin up to somethink or other. You 'ad to py that other chap a tidy bit, eih ?

JANE CLEGG. Mr Munce, I haven't got the money to pay you ! . . .

MUNCE. [*alarmed again.*] Now, look 'ere ! . . .

JANE CLEGG. And if I had, I wouldn't pay it.

MUNCE. What you mean you wouldn't py it. 'E owes it, dont 'e ?

JANE CLEGG. I don't know, and I don't care. I've just paid one hundred and forty pounds that he'd taken from his employers ! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. Jane, is that fair ?

JANE CLEGG. Fair ! I've almost forgotten what being fair is. You've told lie after lie, and now at the end I find that the money you stole was not used to pay your gambling debts.

MUNCE. Did 'e say 'e took money to py me ?

JANE CLEGG. Yes.

MUNCE. 'E's a liar, then. I on'y wish 'e 'ad.

JANE CLEGG. What did you do with it, Henry ? I've asked you that so many times.

. . . I wonder I trouble to ask you again.
You'll only tell me some fresh lie.

MUNCE. I know what 'e done with it!

HENRY CLEGG. Munce! . . .

MUNCE. You py me my money, then. [*turning quickly to JANE.*] Look 'ere, Mrs Clegg, it's 'ard on you, I know, but it's 'ard on me, too. I'll be ruined if I can't py up to-morrow. I will, straight. 'E promised faithfully 'e'd let me 'ave it. I've always acted straight. Look 'ere, now, you'll py me, won't you?

JANE CLEGG. No. He can pay you himself.

MUNCE. 'Ow can 'e py. 'E ain't got no money.

JANE CLEGG. He must have money. He only stole his employer's money a few days ago, and if he hasn't paid you, he must have it, unless . . .

HENRY CLEGG. I haven't got a ha'penny.

MUNCE. My God, what'll I do. [*Starting up in anger and rushing at CLEGG.*] You py up, you blighter!

JANE CLEGG. Mr Munce!

MUNCE. [*Stopping and beginning to snivel.*] Yes, Mrs Clegg.

JANE CLEGG. Sit down, please. You'll wake my children.

MUNCE. I'm very sorry. [*He lets his head*

fall on the table and begins to sob.] I'm upset, I am, that's what it is.

HENRY CLEGG. It's no good crying like a kid! . . .

MUNCE. I never failed to py before. I bin straight I 'ave. Oh, Gawd! . . . [*becomes inarticulate.*]

JANE CLEGG. Listen to me, Mr Munce. [*MUNCE groans loudly.*] Please sit up, Mr Munce. It's ridiculous to behave like that.

HENRY CLEGG. Of course it is. Anybody'd think you were a woman, the way you're going on!

MUNCE. I don't want to make no fuss! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Very well, then, don't make any. Now, listen to me.

MUNCE. Yes, Mrs Clegg.

JANE CLEGG. I have just paid the gentleman you saw here a few moments ago, one hundred and forty pounds to replace the money my husband stole from his employer less than a week ago.

HENRY CLEGG. You needn't advertise the fact.

JANE CLEGG. [*ignoring him.*] My husband told me that he stole the money to pay gambling debts due to you.

MUNCE. 'E never! . . .

JANE CLEGG. One moment, please. It now appears that he has not paid you anything.

MUNCE. Not a 'a'penny, 'e 'asn't.

JANE CLEGG. Well, then, the inference is that he still has the money he stole. You can't dispose of a hundred and forty pounds in a day or two, can you?

MUNCE. [*to HENRY CLEGG.*] Look 'ere, Clegg, 'ave you got the money or 'ave you not?

HENRY CLEGG. I tell you I haven't.

JANE CLEGG. Then what did you do with it?

HENRY CLEGG. I haven't got it. Look here, I'm not going to be cross-examined as if I were a criminal! . . .

JANE CLEGG. You are a criminal. You've robbed your employer.

HENRY CLEGG. [*throwing out his hands.*] There, Munce, that's the sort of thing I have to endure. How'd you like it!

JANE CLEGG. Tell us what you did with the money. Mr Munce and I have a right to know.

HENRY CLEGG. Well, you shan't know, see. Damn you, I've had enough of your questions. I'm sick of you!

JANE CLEGG. Yes, Henry, I think we've both

about reached the end of things ; but that won't help Mr Munce, will it ?

HENRY CLEGG. I don't care about Munce !

MUNCE. [*jumping up.*] Oh, don't you. Don't you then. We'll soon see about that. I bin treatin' you jolly well, I 'ave. I 'eld my tongue all this time when I might 'ave said things, on'y I didden want to round on a pal. [*to JANE CLEGG.*] 'Ere, ast 'im about 'is fancy woman ! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. You swine !

MUNCE. Go on, ast 'im about 'er. Ast 'im what's the matter with 'er. Go on, ast 'im that.

HENRY CLEGG. You dirty dog ! [*He rushes at MUNCE, and they close and struggle together.*] I'll choke the life out of you.

JANE CLEGG. You'll be hanged if you do that, Henry !

HENRY CLEGG. [*snorting with disgust.*] You're not worth killing !

MUNCE. [*gasping.*] You'll 'ear about this, you will ! I'll 'ave you put in jail for it, see ! If I don't get my money, I'll get somethink. Jus' you wait ! I'll py you aht, so 'elp me Gawd, I will !

He stumbles towards the door.

JANE CLEGG. Mr Munce, would you like your money ?

MUNCE. It's no good tryin' to come it over me! . . .

JANE CLEGG. It's twenty-five pounds, isn't it?

MUNCE. Yes, that's all! Fancy me bein' stumped for twenty-five quid! Me what never failed yet, an' then to be 'alf-throttled! . . .

JANE CLEGG. If you'll sit down for a little while and forget that you've been half throttled perhaps I'll pay the money to you.

MUNCE. [*incredulously.*] You said you wouldn't think! [*He comes back to the table, and slaps his hand on it.*] Look 'ere, I ain't goin' to be 'umbugged! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Have I tried to humbug you, Mr Munce?

MUNCE. [*in a puzzled tone.*] No. No, you ain't. That's true enough. But there's no knowin'. . . .

JANE CLEGG. Listen, Mr Munce, I'll pay you the twenty-five pounds on one condition.

MUNCE. What is it?

JANE CLEGG. That you tell me about my husband's fancy woman!

MUNCE. Gimme the money first?

HENRY CLEGG. Blackguard!

MUNCE. Gentleman!

JANE CLEGG. I haven't got the money in the house, Mr Munce, but I'll give it to you to-morrow.

MUNCE. That's all very fine! . . .

JANE CLEGG. You'll have to trust me, Mr Munce. After all, you've told most of the story to me already, haven't you? I know that there is a fancy woman. . . . Henry didn't deny it . . . and I understand there will be a . . . fancy child! You see, the remainder of the story hardly matters, only I'm curious. . . . I'm just curious to know all of it.

MUNCE. I don't know much meself about it, on'y one dy las' week I saw 'im an' 'er talkin' in the street! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Yes, in the street!

HENRY CLEGG. Look here, I can't stand this. I'll own up. It's true.

MUNCE. I said to 'im when I come 'ere that last time, "That was a fine bit o' skirt you 'ad to-dy!" and then 'e tole me abaht it. She'd on'y jus' been to the doctor! . . .

JANE CLEGG. I see!

HENRY CLEGG. I tell you I own up. Isn't that enough?

MUNCE. 'E said if 'e 'ad the money 'e'd clear out of Englan' with the woman! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. You're a pal. So help me God, you are!

JANE CLEGG. If he had the money? . . .

MUNCE. Yes. Go to Canada or somewhere!

JANE CLEGG. Canada! Canada! Oh! [*Her nerve fails for a moment; but she recovers herself.*] I suppose that was why he took the money. He wanted me to give him money!

HENRY CLEGG. I can't help it. You've never understood me, never tried to. You've always sort of preached at me, and I'm not the sort that can stand being preached at. You're different from me. You're hard and you don't make allowances. Kitty's more my match than you are. I've been happy with her, happier than I've ever been with you, and that's straight.

JANE CLEGG. [*to MUNCE.*] Will you come in the morning, Mr Munce, for the money, and we can go to the solicitor together, and arrange the matter.

MUNCE. You're not playin' about with me, are you! You mean it, don't you?

HENRY CLEGG. My wife means everything she says. Don't you insinuate! . . .

MUNCE. Awright, awright! You'd be upset if you was me.

JANE CLEGG. Good-night, Mr Munce. Come at eleven o'clock.

MUNCE. Good-night, Mrs Clegg. [*He stands about irresolutely.*] Look 'ere, jus' gimme a little IOU for the money. It 'ud sort of ease my mind.

HENRY CLEGG. [*hustling him.*] Go on, get out of this! Her word's good enough for you.

MUNCE. Oh, she's awright. It's you's the rotter! Don't you shove me, or you see! That's all. See! Don't you shove me! I'll 'ave you up! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Mr Munce, please remember that my children are asleep.

MUNCE. I'm very sorry, Mrs Clegg. Well, look 'ere, I know you're straight. I'll be easy in my mind awright. I'll pop roun' 'ere to-morrer an' we'll settle it all up. Goo'-night, Mrs Clegg. [*He takes her hand and shakes it warmly.*] You saved me, straight you 'ave. Never failed yet, an' there ain't many bookies can sy that! Give you my word! I woulden 'a' bin nasty! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Good-night, Mr Munce.

MUNCE. Good-night! Good-night! [*He picks up his hat and puts it on.*] I be roun' to-morrer. [*He looks at HENRY CLEGG.*] You an'

me ain't friends, see. I don't want nothink more to do with you. Absolute rotter!

HENRY CLEGG. Go on! Get out!

MUNCE. Serve you right if she'd let you go to quod, an' your fancy woman to the work-'ouse. Tooloo! [*He goes out walking quickly up the passage. He opens the street door. Holding the street door open.*] Absolute rotter! [*He goes out.*]

JANE CLEGG. [*sitting down before the fire.*] That's true, isn't it, Henry.

HENRY CLEGG. What?

JANE CLEGG. You are an absolute rotter.

HENRY CLEGG. I don't know. I'm not a bad chap, really. I'm just weak. I'd be all right if I had a lot of money and a wife that wasn't better than I am. . . . Oh, I know, Jane! You *are* better than I am. Any fool can see that! It doesn't do a chap much good to be living with a woman who's his superior, at least not the sort of chap I am. I ought to have married a woman like myself, or a bit worse. That's what Kitty is. She's worse than I am, and that sort of makes me love her. It's different with you. I always feel mean here. Yes, I am mean. I know that; but it makes me meaner than I really am to be living with you.

[*He sits down at the table and begins to fill his pipe.*]

Do you understand, Jane ? Somehow, the mean things I do that don't amount to much, I can't tell 'em to you, or carry 'em off as if they weren't mean, and I do meaner things to cover them up. That's the way of it. I don't act like that with Kitty.

JANE CLEGG. It's funny, isn't it, Henry.

HENRY CLEGG. [*lighting his pipe.*] Yes, I suppose it is. Damned funny !

JANE CLEGG. It's so funny that we married at all. I used to think you were so fine before I married you. You were so jolly and free and light-hearted. . . . Somehow, I feel as if I'd lost you in the church that day ! Do you know ? It's as if I went there to find you, and found someone else.

HENRY CLEGG. And you're not like what I thought you were !

JANE CLEGG. No. [*She picks up her sewing and makes a few stitches.* HENRY CLEGG gets up from the table and draws a chair up to the fire. He sits for a second or two smoking.] Henry, have you spent all that money ?

HENRY CLEGG. I haven't spent any of it. I've got . . . well, I *have* spent some of it.

JANE CLEGG. Why didn't you pay Mr Munce, then ?

HENRY CLEGG. What ! Not likely. I need all of it !

JANE CLEGG. Yes, I suppose you do. When are you going to Canada ?

HENRY CLEGG. Eh ?

JANE CLEGG. You're going with her, aren't you ?

HENRY CLEGG. [*after a short pause.*] Yes.

JANE CLEGG. I suppose the money you spent was on the tickets ?

HENRY CLEGG. Yes.

JANE CLEGG. When are you going ?

HENRY CLEGG [*with a great effort.*] To-morrow !

JANE CLEGG. To-morrow ! . . . [*She puts her sewing down, and looks steadily in front of her.*

HENRY CLEGG *gets up and begins to pace the room.*]

I suppose that was why you were so anxious that I should pay the money to Mr Morrison to-night. If he'd gone to Mr Harper this evening you might have been arrested before you had time to get away ?

HENRY CLEGG. Yes.

JANE CLEGG. You tried to kiss me ! . . . Oh ! Oh ! You Judas !

HENRY CLEGG. What could I do? I had to think of Kitty. She's frightened, Jane, damned frightened. She didn't want to have a child, and she's scared. If I'd been arrested! . . . Oh, it's horrible to think of her sitting somewhere waiting, and me not there!

JANE CLEGG. I used to wait, and you weren't there.

HENRY CLEGG. Yes, but she hasn't any spirit.

JANE CLEGG. You wouldn't have told me, or your mother? Johnnie and Jenny! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. I wouldn't have liked leaving Jenny. Johnnie's your child.

JANE CLEGG. What's Kitty like, Henry?

HENRY CLEGG. She's prettier than you.

JANE CLEGG. Yes.

HENRY CLEGG. Well, it's hard to say. You're a finer woman than she is, but she's my sort, and you're not. [*He pauses in his pacing, and then comes to the fireplace and stands before her.*] You're a rum sort of woman, Jane. There aren't many women would talk about this the way you do.

JANE CLEGG. No?

HENRY CLEGG. It's just as if we were strangers talking about something that didn't matter.

JANE CLEGG. It is like that, isn't it, only I have two children, and you're their father.

HENRY CLEGG. [*sitting down.*] Well, I don't know! It's a funny sort of a world; mixed-up like!

JANE CLEGG. Does Kitty live far from here?

HENRY CLEGG. Other side of the town.

JANE CLEGG. Alone?

HENRY CLEGG. Lodgings!

JANE CLEGG. What does she do?

HENRY CLEGG. She's in a shop! . . .

JANE CLEGG. Yes, she must be very frightened. . . . What train do you catch to-morrow?

HENRY CLEGG. You speak as if you wanted me to go.

JANE CLEGG. How else would you have me speak?

HENRY CLEGG. It doesn't seem right somehow. I mean, I'm your husband and all that. I should have thought you'd want me to stay.

JANE CLEGG. You wouldn't stay, would you?

HENRY CLEGG. Well, no! I promised Kitty!

JANE CLEGG. You keep the promises you make to her. [*He nods his head.*] Why should I wish you to stay with me? You are a different man from the one I married. You don't love

me. You've never been loyal to me. There isn't any sense in living with a man if he's not loyal! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. I can't make you out. It doesn't seem right, somehow. I don't pretend to be a religious chap! . . .

JANE CLEGG. It wouldn't be much good, would it?

HENRY CLEGG. But still I believe in religion. I mean to say, I know I'm not doing the right thing. I'm going away with Kitty, but I know I'm doing wrong. It's religion tells me that. You don't seem to understand that. You talk as if it was just a case of you and me not suiting . . . and that was all. It's not right. You ask mother! She wouldn't talk as you're talking. That's because she's religious. If she were you, she wouldn't let me go quietly. She'd tear Kitty to bits.

JANE CLEGG. I suppose so. [*Rising and extending her hand to him.*] Good-bye, Henry!

HENRY CLEGG. How do you mean?

JANE CLEGG. Good-bye, of course. You'll go to Kitty to-night. It . . . it'll be more convenient to-morrow.

HENRY CLEGG. [*standing up and gaping at her.*] My God!

JANE CLEGG. You didn't think I'd let you stay here to-night with me! Oh, Henry, it wouldn't be decent! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. You mean I'm to go now.

JANE CLEGG. Yes.

HENRY CLEGG. But . . .

JANE CLEGG. There can be no argument about it. You must go now. It would be like committing a sin to let you stay with me to-night!

HENRY CLEGG. I don't understand you. Damn it, you're condoning the offence.

JANE CLEGG. [*again holding out her hand.*] Good-night, Henry, and good-bye. I'm very tired.

HENRY CLEGG. You really mean it?

JANE CLEGG. Yes.

HENRY CLEGG. I can't understand you. [*He looks about him irresolutely.*] I can't go off like this without seeing the youngsters and the mater! . . .

JANE CLEGG. You'll have to go to-morrow, so it won't make much difference to you if you go to-night!

HENRY CLEGG. You really do mean it?

JANE CLEGG. I do.

HENRY CLEGG. Oh, well! . . . I suppose I can go up and look at the kids?

JANE CLEGG. You might wake them, and they'd wonder! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. I could have a peep at them!

JANE CLEGG. It would be better not.

HENRY CLEGG. All right! [*He goes into the hall and puts on his hat and coat. He returns to the room.*] How'll you explain?

JANE CLEGG. I'll tell your mother! . . .

HENRY CLEGG. You'll look after her, won't you? She's not a bad old soul though she does get on my nerves.

JANE CLEGG. Yes, I'll look after her.

There is silence for a few moments.

HENRY CLEGG. Well! [*He looks at her as if he does not know what to do.*]

JANE CLEGG. Good-bye!

HENRY CLEGG. [*taking her hand.*] Good-bye, Jane. I've not been a good husband. . . . You're well rid of me. [*He tries to put his arms round her, but she struggles out of his reach.*] You might give me a kiss before I go.

JANE CLEGG. [*covering her face with her hand and speaking like one who is horrified.*] I couldn't, I couldn't. It would be a sin!

HENRY CLEGG. [*with an affectation of jauntiness.*] Well, of course, if that's how you look at it. Good-bye, once more!

JANE CLEGG. [*she turns her back to him.*]
Good-bye!

HENRY CLEGG. Well, I'm damned! [*He goes into the hall, and puts his hand on the door. He waits for a moment.*] I'm off now.

She does not reply. He opens the door, and then waits a little while. She does not move. He goes out and closes the door after him. She stands for a few moments gazing into the fire. Then she turns down the light and goes upstairs to bed.

CURTAIN











