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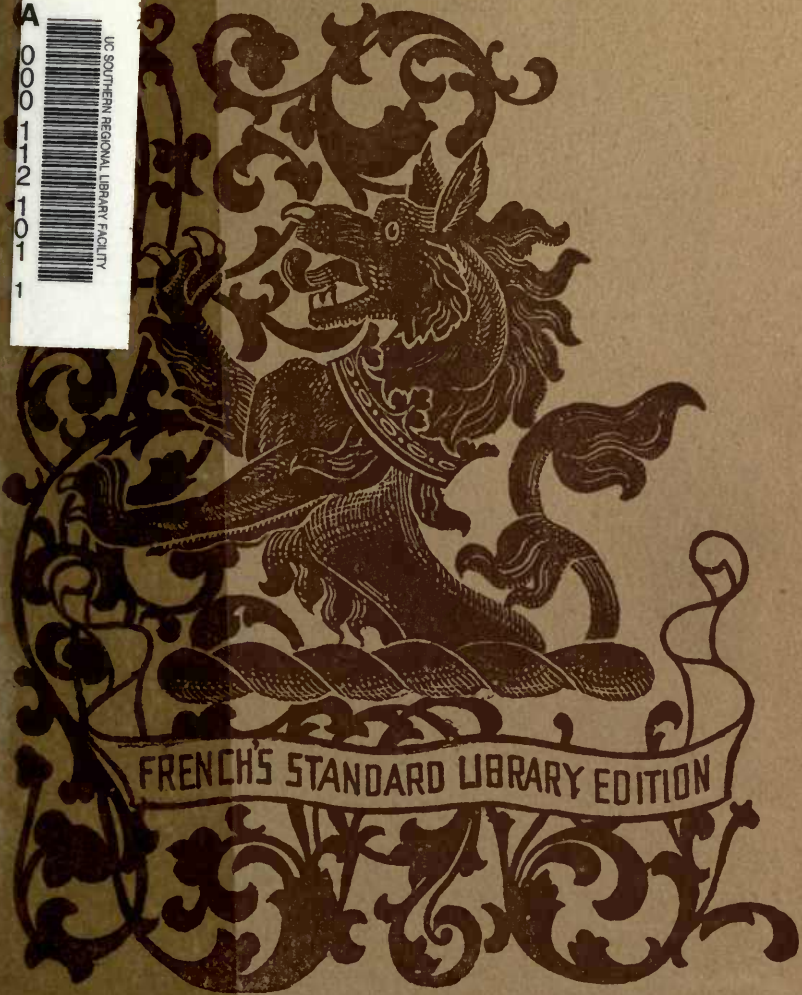
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ROMANTIC AGE

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SAMUEL FRENCH, 25 West 45th Street, New York City
Our New Descriptive Catalogue Sent Free on Request

THE ROMANTIC AGE

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY

A. A. MILNE

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The following is a copy of the programme of the first performance of "The Romantic Age" at the Comedy Theatre, New York, Friday evening, November 17th, 1922.

HUGH FORD and FREDERICK STANHOPE

PRESENT

A. A. MILNE'S

New Comedy

THE ROMANTIC AGE

Staged by Frederick Stanhope

THE CAST

MRS. KNOWLE	<i>Daisy Belmore</i>
MELISANDE (HER DAUGHTER)	<i>Margalo Gillmore</i>
JANE BAGOT (HER NIECE)	<i>Jean Ford</i>
ALICE	<i>Ida Molthen</i>
MR. KNOWLE	<i>Marsh Allen</i>
BOBBY	<i>Neil Martin</i>
GERVASE MALLORY	<i>Leslie Howard</i>
ERN	<i>Paul Jaccia</i>
MASTER SUSAN	<i>J. M. Kerrigan</i>

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

- ACT I—*The Hall of Mr. Knowle's House; Evening*
ACT II—*A Glade in the Woods; Morning*
ACT III—*The Hall again; Afternoon*



LESLIE HOWARD AS GERVASE

[To face page 5

CHARACTERS

First produced by Mr. Arthur Wontner at the Comedy Theatre, London, on October 18, 1920, with the following cast :

HENRY KNOWLE	A. Bromley-Davenport.
MARY KNOWLE (his Wife)	Lottie Venne.
MELISANDE (his Daughter)	Barbara Hoffe.
JANE (his Niece)	Dorothy Tetley.
BOBBY	John Williams.
GERVASE MALLORY	Arthur Wontner.
EEN	Roy Lennol.
GENTLEMAN SUSAN	H. O. Nicholson.
ALICE	Irene Rathbone.

ACT I

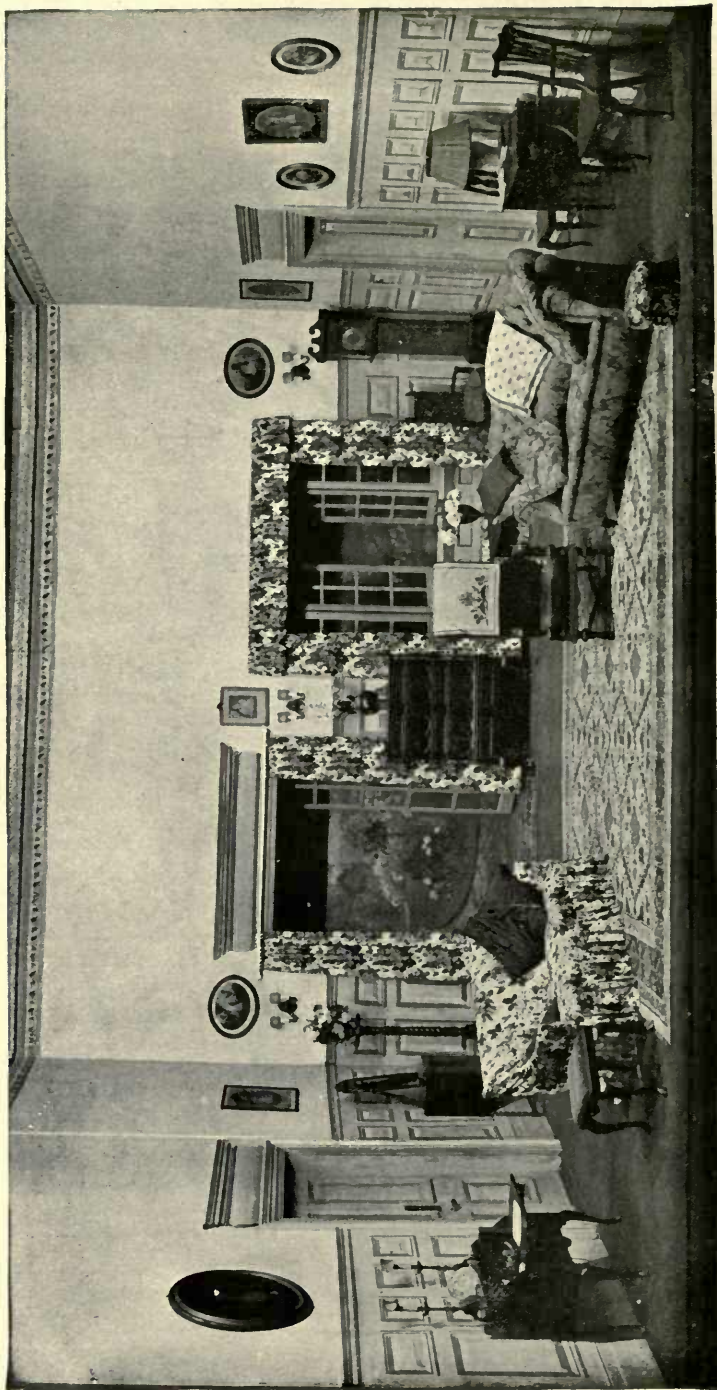
The hall of Mr. KNOWLE'S house. Evening.

ACT II

A glade in the wood. Morning.

ACT III

The hall again. Afternoon.



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THE ROMANTIC AGE

ACT I

The inner hall of MR. HENRY KNOWLE'S country house, at about 9.15 of a June evening. There are doors R. and L.—on the right leading to the drawing-room, on the left to the entrance hall, the dining-room and the library. At the back are windows—French windows on the right, then an interval of wall, then casement windows.

MRS. HENRY KNOWLE, her daughter, MELISANDE, and her niece, JANE BAGOT, are waiting for their coffee. MRS. KNOWLE, short and stoutish, is reclining on the sofa; JANE, pleasant-looking and rather obviously pretty, is sitting on the settee R., lower end, glancing at a book; MELISANDE, the beautiful, the romantic, is standing by the open French windows, gazing into the night.

ALICE, the parlourmaid, comes in with the coffee and goes down L. She stands in front of MRS. KNOWLE, a little embarrassed because MRS. KNOWLE'S eyes are closed. She waits there until JANE looks up from her book.

JANE. Aunt Mary, dear, are you having coffee?

MRS. KNOWLE (*opening her eyes with a start*). Coffee. Oh, yes, coffee. Jane, put the milk in for me. (ALICE crosses to JANE.) And no sugar. Dr. Anderson is very firm about that. "No sugar, Mrs. Knowle," he said. "Oh, Dr. Anderson!" I said.

(JANE pours out her own and her aunt's coffee, and takes her cup off the tray.)

JANE. Thank you.

(ALICE takes the tray to MRS. KNOWLE.)

MRS. KNOWLE. Thank you.

(ALICE goes over to MELISANDE, who says nothing, but waves her away. ALICE goes out L.)

MRS. KNOWLE (*as soon as ALICE is gone*). Jane!

JANE. Yes, Aunt Mary?

MRS. KNOWLE. Was my mouth open?

JANE. Oh, no, Aunt Mary.

MRS. KNOWLE. Ah, I'm glad of that. It's so bad for the servants.
(*She finishes her coffee.*)

JANE (*getting up and moving L.*). Shall I put it down for you?

MRS. KNOWLE. Thank you, dear.

(*JANE puts the two cups down and goes back to her book. MRS. KNOWLE fidgets a little on her sofa.*)

MRS. KNOWLE. Sandy! (*There is no answer.*) Sandy!

JANE. Melisande!

(*MELISANDE turns her head.*)

MELISANDE. Did you call me, Mother?

MRS. KNOWLE. Three times, darling. Didn't you hear me?

MELISANDE. I am sorry, Mother, I was thinking of other things.

MRS. KNOWLE. You think too much, dear. You remember what the great poet tells us: "Do noble things, not dream them all day long." Tennyson, wasn't it? I know I wrote it in your album for you when you were a little girl. It's so true.

MELISANDE. Kingsley, Mother, not Tennyson.

JANE (*nodding*). Kingsley, that's right.

MRS. KNOWLE. Well, it's the same thing. I know when *my* mother used to call me I used to come running up, saying, "What is it, Mummy, darling?" And even if it was anything upstairs, like a handkerchief or a pair of socks to be mended, I used to trot off happily, saying to myself, "Do noble things, not dream them all day long."

MELISANDE (*coming down c. to chair c.*). I am sorry, Mother. What is the noble thing you want doing?

MRS. KNOWLE. Well now, you see, I've forgotten. If only you'd come at once, dear—

MELISANDE. I was looking out into the night. It's a wonderful night. Midsummer Night.

MRS. KNOWLE. Midsummer Night. And now I suppose the days will start drawing in, and we shall have winter upon us before we know where we are. All these changes of the seasons are very inconsiderate to an invalid. (*MELISANDE goes up and then to window L.C.*) Ah, now I remember what I wanted, dear. Can you find me another cushion? Dr. Anderson considers it most important that the small of the back should be well supported after a meal. (*Indicating the place.*) Just here, dear.

JANE (*jumping up with the cushion from her chair and moving L.*). Let me, Aunt Mary.

MRS. KNOWLE. Thank you, Jane. Just here, please.

(*JANE arranges it. MELISANDE moves across to the French windows.*)

JANE. Is that right?

MRS. KNOWLE. Thank you, dear. I only do it for Dr. Anderson's sake.

(JANE goes back to her book and MELISANDE goes back to her *Midsummer Night*. There is silence for a little.)

MRS. KNOWLE. Oh, Sandy . . . Sandy!

JANE. Melisande!

MELISANDE. Yes, Mother!

MRS. KNOWLE. Oh, Sandy, I've just remembered—— (MELISANDE shudders.) What is it, darling child? Are you cold? That comes of standing by the open window in a treacherous climate like this. Close the window and come and sit down properly.

MELISANDE. It's a wonderful night, Mother. *Midsummer Night*. I'm not cold. (Coming down to chair R.)

MRS. KNOWLE. But you shuddered. I distinctly saw you shudder. Didn't you see her, Jane?

JANE. I'm afraid I wasn't looking, Aunt Mary.

MELISANDE (sitting in chair C.). I didn't shudder because I was cold. I shuddered because you will keep calling me by that horrible name. I shudder every time I hear it.

MRS. KNOWLE (surprised). What name, Sandy?

MELISANDE. There it is again. Oh, why did you christen me by such a wonderful, beautiful, magical name as Melisande, if you were going to call me Sandy?

MRS. KNOWLE. Well, dear, as I think I've told you, that was a mistake of your father's. I suppose he got it out of some book. I should certainly never have agreed to it, if I had heard him distinctly. I thought he said *Millicent*—after your Aunt Milly. And not being very well at the time, and leaving it all to him, I never really knew about it until it was too late to do anything. I did say to your father, "Can't we christen her again?" But there was nothing in the prayer book about it except "riper years," and nobody seemed to know when riper years began. Besides, we were all calling you Sandy then. I think Sandy is a very pretty name, don't you, Jane?

JANE. Oh, but don't you think Melisande is beautiful, Aunt Mary? I mean really beautiful.

MRS. KNOWLE. Well, it never seems to me quite respectable, not for a nicely-brought-up young girl in a Christian house. It makes me think of the sort of person who meets a strange young man to whom she has never been introduced, and talks to him in a forest with her hair coming down. They find her afterwards floating in a pool. Not at all the thing one wants for one's daughter.

JANE. Oh, but how thrilling it sounds!

MRS. KNOWLE. Well, I think you are safer with "Jane," dear. Your mother knew what she was about. And if I can save my only child from floating in a pool by calling her Sandy, I certainly think it is my duty to do so.

MELISANDE (to herself ecstatically). Melisande!

MRS. KNOWLE (to MELISANDE). Oh, and talking about floating in a pool reminds me about the bread-sauce at dinner to-night.

You heard what your father said? You must give cook a good talking to in the morning. She has been getting very careless lately. I don't know what's come over her. (*She drops her handkerchief.*)

MELISANDE. *I've* come over her. When you were over her, everything was all right. You know all about housekeeping; you take an interest in it. I don't. I hate it. How can you expect the house to be run properly when they all know I hate it? Why did you ever give it up and make me do it when you know how I hate it?

MRS. KNOWLE. Well, you must learn not to hate it. I'm sure Jane here doesn't hate it, and her mother is always telling me what a great help she is.

MELISANDE (*warningly*). It's no good your saying you like it, Jane, after what you told me yesterday.

JANE. I don't like it, but it doesn't make me miserable doing it. But then I'm different. I'm not romantic like Melisande.

MELISANDE. One doesn't need to be very romantic not to want to talk about bread-sauce. Bread-sauce on a night like this! (*She moves up to the French windows again.*)

MRS. KNOWLE. Well, I'm only thinking of you, Sandy, not of myself. If I thought about myself I should disregard all the warnings that Dr. Anderson keeps giving me, and I should insist on doing the housekeeping just as I always used to. But I have to think of you. I want to see you married to some nice, steady young man before I die—my handkerchief, Jane—(*JANE picks up and gives her her handkerchief from the other end of the sofa*)—before I die (*she touches her eyes with her handkerchief*), and no nice young man will want to marry you, if you haven't learnt how to look after his house for him.

MELISANDE (*contemptuously*). If that's marriage, I shall never get married. (*Comes down and sits on arm of chair C.*)

JANE (*shocked*). Melisande, darling!

MRS. KNOWLE. Dr. Anderson was saying, only yesterday, trying to make me more cheerful, "Why, Mrs. Knowle," he said, "you'll live another hundred years yet." "Dr. Anderson," I said, "I don't want to live another hundred years. I only want to live until my dear daughter, Melisande"—I didn't say Sandy to him because it seemed rather familiar—"I only want to live until my daughter Melisande is happily married to some nice, steady young man. Do this for me, Dr. Anderson," I said, "and I shall be your lifelong debtor." He promised to do his best. It was then that he mentioned about the cushion in the small of the back after meals. And so don't forget to tell cook about the bread-sauce, will you, dear?

MELISANDE. I will tell her, Mother.

MRS. KNOWLE. That's right. I like a man to be interested in his food. I hope both your husbands, Sandy and Jane, will take a proper interest in what they eat. You will find that, after you have

been married some years, and told each other everything you did and saw before you met, there isn't really anything to talk about at meals except food. And you must talk; I hope you will both remember that. Nothing breaks up the home so quickly as silent meals. Of course, breakfast doesn't matter, because he has his paper then; and after you have said, "Is there anything in the paper, dear?" and he has said, "No," then he doesn't expect anything more. I wonder sometimes why they go on printing the newspapers. I've been married twenty years, and there has never been anything in the paper yet.

MELISANDE. Oh, Mother, I hate to hear you talking about marriage like that. Wasn't there ever *any* kind of romance between you and Father? Not even when he was wooing you? Wasn't there ever one magic Midsummer morning when you saw suddenly "a livelier emerald twinkle in the grass, a purer sapphire melt into the sea"? Wasn't there ever one passionate ecstatic moment when "once he drew with one long kiss my whole soul through my lips, as sunlight drinketh dew"? Or did you talk about bread-sauce *all* the time? (*Crosses to settee R. and sits.*)

JANE (*eagerly*). Tell us about it, Aunt Mary.

MRS. KNOWLE. Well, dear, there isn't very much to tell. I am quite sure that we never drank dew together, or anything like that, as Sandy suggests, and it wasn't by the sea at all, it was at Surbiton. (MELISANDE *shudders.*) He used to come down from London with his racquet and play tennis with us. And then he would stay on to supper sometimes, and then after supper we would go into the garden together—it was quite dark then, but everything smelt so beautifully, I shall always remember it—and we talked, oh, I don't know what about, but I knew somehow that I should marry him one day. I don't think *he* knew—he wasn't sure—and then he came to a subscription dance one evening—I think Mother, your grandmother, guessed that that was to be my great evening, because she was very particular about my dress, and I remember she sent me upstairs again before we started, because I hadn't got the right pair of shoes on—rather a tight pair—however, I put them on. And there was a hansom outside the hall, and it was our last dance together, and he said, "Shall we sit it out, Miss Bagot?" Well, of course, I was only too glad to, and we sat it out in the hansom, driving all round Surbiton, and what your grandmother would have said I don't know, but, of course, I never told her. And when we got home after the dance, I went up to her room—as soon as I'd got my shoes off—and said, "Mother, I have some wonderful news for you," and she said, "Not Mr. Knowle—Henry?" and I said, "M," rather bright-eyed, you know, and wanting to cry. And she said, "Oh, my darling child!" and—Jane, where's my handkerchief? (*It has dropped off the sofa and JANE picks it up.*) Thank you, dear. (*She dabs her eyes.*) Well, that's really all, you know, except that—(*she dabs her eyes again*)—I'm afraid I'm

feeling rather overcome. I'm sure Dr. Anderson would say it was very bad for me to feel overcome. Your poor dear grandmother. Jane, dear, why did you ask me to tell you all this? I must go away and compose myself before your uncle and Mr. Coote come in. (MELISANDE rises and moves up c.) I don't know what I should do if Mr. Coote saw me like this. (She begins to get up.) And after calling me a Spartan Mother only yesterday, because I said that if any nice, steady young man came along and took my own dear little girl away from me, I should bear the terrible wrench in silence rather than cause either of them a moment's remorse. (She is up now.) There! (Walking towards door R.)

JANE (rising). Shall I come with you?

MRS. KNOWLE (above settee R.). No, dear, not just now. Let me be by myself for a little. (She turns back suddenly at the door.) Oh! Perhaps later on, when the men come from the dining-room, dear Jane, you might join me, with your Uncle Henry—if the opportunity occurs. . . . (At door R.) But only if it occurs, of course.

(She goes out R.)

JANE (coming back to the settee L. and putting the cushions straight). Poor Aunt Mary! It always seems so queer that one's mother and aunts and people should have had their romances too. (Sits on settee L.)

MELISANDE (coming down c.). Do you call that romance, Jane? Tennis and subscription dances and wearing tight shoes?

JANE (awkwardly). Well, no, darling, not romance of course, but you know what I mean.

MELISANDE. Just think of the commonplace little story which mother has just told us, and compare it with any of the love-stories of history. Isn't it pitiful, Jane, that people should be satisfied now with so little?

JANE. Yes, darling, very, very sad, but I don't think Aunt Mary—

MELISANDE (moving to settee R.). I am not blaming Mother. It is the same almost everywhere nowadays. There is no romance left.

JANE. No, darling. Of course, I am not romantic like you, but I do agree with you. It is very sad. Somehow there is no—(she searches for the right word)—no romance left.

MELISANDE. Just think of the average marriage. It makes one shudder. (Turns up stage.)

JANE (doing her best). Positively shudder!

MELISANDE (turns down stage). He meets Her at—(she shudders)—a subscription dance, or a tennis party—(she shudders again) or—at golf. He calls upon her mother—perhaps in a top hat—perhaps (tragically) even in a bowler hat. (Sits on settee R.)

JANE. A bowler hat! One shudders.

MELISANDE. Her mother makes tactful inquiries about his in-

come—discovers that he is a nice, steady young man—and decides that he shall marry her daughter. He is asked to come again, he is invited to parties ; it is understood that he is falling in love with the daughter. The rest of the family are encouraged to leave them alone together—if the opportunity occurs, Jane. (*Contemptuously.*) But, of course, only if it occurs.

JANE (*awkwardly.*) Yes, dear.

MELISANDE. One day he proposes to her.

JANE (*to herself ecstatically.*) Oh ! (*Moves quickly over to MELISANDE.*)

MELISANDE. He stutters out a few unbeautiful words which she takes to be a proposal. She goes and tells Mother. He goes and tells Father. They are engaged. They talk about each other as “my fiancé.” Perhaps they are engaged for months and months—

JANE (*by MELISANDE’S side.*) Years and years sometimes, Melisande.

MELISANDE. For years and years—and wherever they go, people make silly little jokes about them, and cough very loudly if they go into a room where the two of them are. And then they get married at last, and everybody comes and watches them get married, and makes more silly jokes, and they go away for what they call a honeymoon, and they tell everybody—they shout it out in the newspapers—*where* they are going for their honeymoon ; and then they come back and start talking about bread-sauce. Oh, Jane, it’s horrible.

JANE. Horrible, darling. (*With a French air.*) But what would you ?

MELISANDE (*in a low thrilling voice.*) What would I ? Ah, what would I, Jane ?

JANE. Because you see, Sandy—(*hastily*) I mean Melisande—you see, darling, this *is* the twentieth century, and—

MELISANDE. Sometimes I see him clothed in mail, riding beneath my lattice window.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewelled shone the saddle leather,
The helmet and the helmet feather
Burned like one burning flame together,
As he rode down to Camelot.

And from his blazoned baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung
As he rode down to Camelot.

JANE. I know, dear. But of course they *don’t* nowadays.

MELISANDE. And as he rides beneath my room, singing to himself, I wave one lily hand to him from my lattice, and toss him down a gage, a gage for him to wear in his helm, a rose—perhaps just a rose.

JANE (*awed.*) No, Melisande, would you really ? Wave a lily hand to him ? (*She waves one.*) I mean, wouldn’t it be rather—you know. Rather forward.

MELISANDE. Forward!

JANE (*upset*). Well, I mean—— Well, of course, I suppose it was different in those days.

MELISANDE. And then when he has slain his enemies in battle, he comes back to me. I knot my sheets together so as to form a rope and I let myself down to him. He places me on the saddle in front of him, and we ride forth together into the world—together for always!

JANE (*a little uncomfortably*). You do get married, I suppose, darling, or do you—er——

MELISANDE (*in a matter-of-fact tone*). We stop at a little hermitage on the way, and a good priest marries us.

JANE (*relieved*). Ah, yes.

MELISANDE. And sometimes he is not in armour. He is a prince from Fairyland. My father is king of a neighbouring country, a country which is sorely troubled by a dragon.

JANE. By a what, dear?

MELISANDE. A dragon.

JANE. Oh, yes, of course.

MELISANDE. The king, my father, offers my hand and half his kingdom to anybody who will slay the monster. A prince who happens to be passing through the country essays the adventure. Alas, the dragon devours him.

JANE (*sympathetically*). Poor fellow.

MELISANDE. And then one evening a beautiful and modest youth in blue and gold appears at my father's court, and begs that he too be allowed to try his fortune with the dragon. Passing through the great hall on my way to my bed-chamber, I see him suddenly. Our eyes meet. . . . Oh, Jane!

JANE. Darling! . . . You ought to have lived in those days, Melisande. They would have suited you so well.

MELISANDE. Will they never come back again?

JANE. Well, I don't quite see how they can. People don't dress in blue and gold nowadays. I mean men.

MELISANDE (*she rises*). No. (*She sighs*). Well, I suppose I shall never marry. (*Moves to casement window L.C.*)

JANE. Of course, I'm not romantic like you, darling, and I don't have time to read all the wonderful books you read, and though I quite agree with everything you say, and of course it must have been thrilling to have lived in those wonderful old days, still here we are, and (*with a wave of the hand*)—and what I mean is—here we are.

MELISANDE (*coming to above chair c.*) You are content to put romance out of your life, and to make the ordinary commonplace marriage?

JANE. What I mean is, that it wouldn't be commonplace if it was the right man. Some nice, clean-looking Englishman—I don't say beautiful—pleasant, and good at games, dependable, not very clever perhaps, but making enough money——

MELISANDE (*carelessly*). It sounds rather like Bobby.

JANE (*confused—rises and crosses to settee L.*). It isn't like Bobby, or anyone else particularly. It's just anybody. It wasn't any particular person. I was just describing the sort of man without thinking of anyone in— (*Sits.*)

MELISANDE. All right, dear, all right.

JANE. Besides, we all know Bobby's devoted to you.

MELISANDE (*firmly, and sitting by JANE on settee L.*). Now, look here, Jane, I warn you solemnly that if you think you are going to leave me and Bobby alone together this evening— (*Voices are heard outside.*) Well, I warn you.

JANE (*in a whisper*). Of course not, darling. (*With perfect tact.*) And, as I was saying, Melisande, it was quite the most— Ah, here you are at last! We wondered what had happened to you!

(*Enter BOBBY and MR. KNOWLE L. JANE has already described BOBBY for us. MR. KNOWLE is a pleasant, middle-aged man with a sense of humour, which he cultivates for his own amusement entirely. He goes to a tobacco jar up c. and fills his pipe.*)

BOBBY (*back of settee L.*). Were you very miserable without us?

JANE (*laughing*). Very.

(*MELISANDE gets up as BOBBY speaks, and moves away to settee R. and sits.*)

MR. KNOWLE. Where's your Mother, Sandy?

MELISANDE. In the dining-room, I think, Father.

MR. KNOWLE (*still filling his pipe*). Ah! Resting, no doubt. By the way, you won't forget what I said about the bread-sauce, will you?

MELISANDE. You don't want it remembered, Father, do you? What you said?

MR. KNOWLE. Not the actual words. (*Coming down.*) All I want, my dear, is that you should endeavour to explain to the cook the difference between bread-sauce and a bread-poultice. Make it clear to her that there is no need to provide a bread-poultice with an obviously healthy chicken, such as we had to-night, but that a properly made bread-sauce is a necessity, if the full flavour of the bird is to be obtained.

MELISANDE. "Full flavour of the bird is to be obtained." Yes, Father.

MR. KNOWLE. That's right, my dear. Bring it home to her. (*Going up for matches.*) A little quiet talk will do wonders. Well, didn't you tell me it was Midsummer Night. Why aren't you two out in the garden looking for fairies?

BOBBY (*at back of sofa L.*). I say, it's a topping night, you know. We ought to be out. D'you feel like a stroll, Sandy?

MELISANDE. No, thank you, Bobby, I don't think I'll go out.

BOBBY. Oh, I say, it's awfully warm.

MR. KNOWLE (*moving towards JANE*). Well, Jane, I shall take you out. If we meet any of Sandy's fairy friends, you can introduce me.

MELISANDE (*looking across warningly at her*). Jane—

JANE (*rises, moves to MR. KNOWLE awkwardly*). I'm afraid, Uncle Henry (*glances at BOBBY and MELISANDE*), that Melisande and I—I promised Sandy—we—

MR. KNOWLE (*putting her arm firmly through his*). Nonsense. I'm not going to have my niece taken away from me, when she is only staying with us for such a short time. (*BOBBY sits in chair down L.*) Besides, I insist upon being introduced to Titania. I want to complain about the rings on the tennis-lawn. They must dance somewhere else.

JANE (*looking anxiously at MELISANDE*). You see, Uncle Henry, I'm not feeling very—

MELISANDE (*resigned*). All right, Jane.

JANE (*brightly*). All right, Uncle Henry.

MR. KNOWLE (*looking at BOBBY—very brightly*). It's all right, Bobby.

JANE (*with an awkward laugh*). Come along! (*They go to the open windows together.*)

MR. KNOWLE (*as they go*). Any message for Oberon, if we meet him?

MELISANDE (*gravely*). No, thank you, Father.

MR. KNOWLE. It's his turn to write, I suppose.

(*JANE laughs as they go out together.*)

(*Left alone, MELISANDE, on settee R. takes up a book while BOBBY walks about the room unhappily, whistling to himself. First he goes up C., then to the back of settee R., then to the back of chair C. He keeps looking across, and at last their eyes meet.*)

MELISANDE (*putting down her book*). Well, Bobby?

BOBBY (*awkwardly*). Well, Sandy?

MELISANDE (*angrily*). Don't call me that; you know how I hate it.

BOBBY (*sitting on arm of chair C.*). Sorry. Melisande. But it's such a dashed mouthful. And your father was calling you Sandy just now, and you didn't say anything.

MELISANDE. One cannot always control one's parents. There comes a time when it is almost useless to say things to them.

BOBBY (*eagerly*). I never mind your saying things to me, Sandy—I mean, Melisande. I never shall mind, really I shan't. Of course, I know I'm not worthy of you, and all that, but—I say, Melisande, isn't there any hope?

MELISANDE. Bobby, I asked you not to talk to me like that again.

BOBBY (*coming to her*). I know you did, but I must. I can't believe that you—

MELISANDE. I told you that, if you promised not to talk like that again, then I wouldn't tell anybody anything about it, so that it shouldn't be awkward for you. And I haven't told anybody, not even Jane, to whom I tell all my secrets. Most men, when they propose to a girl, and she refuses them, have to go right out of the country and shoot lions; it's the only thing left for them to do. But I did try and make it easy for you, Bobby. (*Sadly.*) And now you're beginning all over again.

BOBBY (*sits on the L. end of settee R.—awkwardly*). I thought perhaps you might have changed your mind. Lots of girls do.

MELISANDE (*contemptuously*). Lots of girls! Is that how you think of me?

BOBBY. Well, your mother said— (*He breaks off hurriedly.*)

MELISANDE (*coldly*). Have you been discussing me with my mother?

BOBBY. I say, Sandy, don't be angry. Sorry; I mean Melisande.

MELISANDE. Don't apologize. Go on.

BOBBY. Well, I didn't *discuss* you with your mother. She just happened to say that girls never knew their own minds, and that they always said "No" the first time, and that I needn't be down-hearted, because—

MELISANDE. That you needn't! You mean you *told* her?

BOBBY. Well, it sort of came out.

MELISANDE (*rising and moving c.—indignantly*). After I had promised that I wouldn't say anything, you went and *told* her! And then I suppose you went and told the cook, and *she* said that her brother's young woman was just the same, and then you told the butcher, and *he* said, "You stick to it, sir. All women are alike. My missis said 'No' to me the first time." (*Walking about.*) And then you went and told the gardeners—I suppose you had all the gardeners together in the potting-shed, and gave them a lecture about it—and when you had told them, you said, "Excuse me a moment, I must now go and tell the postman," and then— (*Moves to settee L.*)

BOBBY (*rising*). I say, steady; you know that isn't fair.

MELISANDE. Oh, what a world! (*She sits down.*)

BOBBY. I say, you know that isn't fair.

MELISANDE (*picking up a book*). Father and Jane are outside, Bobby, if you have anything you wish to tell them. But I suppose they know already. (*She pretends to read.*)

BOBBY (*crossing to MELISANDE*). I say, you know— (*He doesn't quite know what to say. There is an awkward silence. Then he says humbly*) I'm awfully sorry, Melisande. Please forgive me.

MELISANDE (*looking at him gravely*). That's nice of you, Bobby. Please forgive me. I wasn't fair.

BOBBY. I swear I never said anything to anybody else, only *you*

mother. And it sort of came out with *her*. She began talking about you——

MELISANDE. I know.

BOBBY. But I never told anybody else.

MELISANDE. It wouldn't be necessary if you told Mother.

BOBBY (*sitting in the chair c., which he moves to a position facing MELISANDE*). I'm awfully sorry, but I really don't see why you should mind so much. I mean, I know I'm not anybody very much, but I can't help falling in love with you, and—well, it *is* a sort of a compliment to you, isn't it?—even if it's only me.

MELISANDE. Of course it is, Bobby, and I do thank you for the compliment. But mixing Mother up in it makes it all so—so unromantic. (*After a pause.*) Sometimes I think I shall never marry.

BOBBY. Oh, rot! . . . I say, you do *like* me, don't you?

MELISANDE. Oh, yes. You are a nice, clean-looking Englishman—I don't say beautiful——

BOBBY. I should hope not!

MELISANDE. Pleasant, good at games, dependable—not very clever, perhaps, but making enough money——

BOBBY. Well, I mean, that's not so bad.

MELISANDE. Oh, but I want so much more!

BOBBY. What sort of things?

MELISANDE. Oh, Bobby, you're so—so ordinary!

BOBBY. Well, dash it all, you didn't want me to be a freak, did you?

MELISANDE (*to herself*). So—commonplace. So—unromantic.

BOBBY. I say, steady on! I don't say I'm always reading poetry and all that, if that's what you mean by romantic, but—commonplace! I'm blessed if I see how you make out that.

MELISANDE (*moving her position to top of settee*). Bobby, I don't want to hurt your feelings——

BOBBY. Go on, never mind my feelings.

MELISANDE. Well then, look at yourself in the glass!

(BOBBY goes anxiously to the glass up *B.*, and then pulls at his clothes.)

BOBBY (*looking back at her*). Well?

MELISANDE. Well!

BOBBY. I don't see what's wrong. (*Coming down again.*)

MELISANDE. Oh, Bobby, everything's wrong. The man to whom I give myself must be not only my lover, but my true knight, my hero, my prince. He must perform deeds of derring-do to win my love. Oh, how can you perform deeds of derring-do in a stupid little suit like that!

BOBBY (*about c., looking at it*). What's the matter with it? It's what every other fellow wears.

MELISANDE (*contemptuously*). What every other fellow wears!

And you think what every other fellow thinks, and talk what every other fellow talks, and eat what every other—— I suppose *you* didn't like the bread-sauce this evening?

BOBBY (*guardedly*). Well, not as bread-sauce.

MELISANDE (*nodding her head*). I thought so, I thought so.

BOBBY (*struck by an idea*). I say, you didn't make it, did you?

MELISANDE. Do I look as if I made it?

BOBBY. I thought perhaps—— (*Sits in chair c.*) You know, I really don't know what you *do* want, Sandy. Sorry; I mean——

MELISANDE. Go on calling me Sandy, I'd rather you did.

BOBBY. Well, when you marry this prince of yours, is *he* going to do the cooking? I don't understand you, Sandy, really I don't.

MELISANDE (*shaking her head gently at him*). No, I'm sure you don't, Bobby.

BOBBY (*still trying, however*). I suppose it's because he's doing the cooking that he won't be able to dress for dinner. He sounds a funny sort of chap; I should like to see him.

MELISANDE. You wouldn't understand him if you did see him.

BOBBY (*jealously*). Have you seen him?

MELISANDE. Only in my dreams.

BOBBY (*relieved*). Oh, well.

MELISANDE (*dreamily to herself*). Perhaps I shall never see him in this world—and then I shall never marry. But if he ever comes for me, he will come not like other men; and because he is so different from everybody else, then I shall know him when he comes for me. He won't talk about bread-sauce—billiards—and the money market. He won't wear a little black suit, with a little black tie—all sideways. (*BOBBY hastily pulls his tie straight.*) I don't know how he will be dressed, but I know this, that when I see him, that when my eyes have looked into his, when his eyes have looked into mine——

(*MRS. KNOWLE has seized this moment to come back for her handkerchief. She enters R. She sees them together and begins to walk out on tiptoe.*)

BOBBY. I say, steady!

MELISANDE (*waking from her dream*). Yes? (*She gives a little laugh.*) Poor Bobby!

BOBBY (*appealingly*). I say, Sandy!

(*They hear MRS. KNOWLE and turn round suddenly.*)

MRS. KNOWLE (*in a whisper, above settes L.*). Don't take any notice of me. I only just came for my handkerchief. (*She continues to walk on tiptoe towards the door L.*)

(*BOBBY rises.*)

MELISANDE. We were just wondering where you were, Mother.

Here's your handkerchief. (*She picks it up from the sofa and hands it to MRS. KNOWLE across the back.*)

MRS. KNOWLE (*still in the voice in which you speak to an invalid*). Thank you, dear. Don't let me interrupt you—I was just going—

MELISANDE (*rising and crossing to the French windows, walking slowly*). But I am just going into the garden. Stay and talk to Bobby, won't you?

MRS. KNOWLE (*with a happy smile, hoping for the best*). Yes, my darling. (*She comes down L. and sits on the top end of settee L.*)

MELISANDE. That's right. (*She stops at the windows and holds out her hands to the night. BOBBY goes up stage, watching her*)—

The moon shines bright: In such a night as this
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees
And they did make no noise, in such a night
Troilus methinks mounted the Trojan walls,
And sighed his soul towards the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night. In such a night
Stood Dido with a willow in her hand,
Upon the wild sea banks, and waft her love
To come again to Carthage.

(*She stays there a moment, and then says in a thrilling voice*) In such a night! Ah!

(*She goes to it.*)

MRS. KNOWLE (*in a satisfied, knowing voice*). Ah! . . . (*Turning to him*) Well, Mr. Coote?

BOBBY (*turning back to her with a start*). Oh—er—yes?

MRS. KNOWLE. No, I think I must call you Bobby. I may call you Bobby, mayn't I?

BOBBY (*coming down c., facing MRS. KNOWLE*). Oh, please do, Mrs. Knowle.

MRS. KNOWLE (*archly*). Not Mrs. Knowle! Can't you think of a better name?

BOBBY (*wondering if he ought to call her MARY*). Er—I'm—I'm afraid I don't quite—

MRS. KNOWLE. Mother.

BOBBY. Oh, but I say—

MRS. KNOWLE. And now come and sit on the sofa with me, and tell me all about it.

(*BOBBY goes to the sofa and sits on the left side of MRS. KNOWLE.*)

BOBBY. But I say, Mrs. Knowle—

MRS. KNOWLE (*shaking a finger playfully at him*). Not Mrs. Knowle, Bobby.

BOBBY. But I say, you mustn't think—I mean Sandy and I—we aren't—

MRS. KNOWLE. You don't mean to tell me, Mr. Coote, that she has refused you again.

BOBBY. Yes. I say, I'd much rather not talk about it.

MRS. KNOWLE. Well, it just shows you that what I said the other day was true. Girls don't know their own minds.

BOBBY (*ruefully*). I think Sandy knows hers—about me, anyhow.

MRS. KNOWLE. Mr. Coote, you are forgetting what the poet said—Shakespeare, or was it the other man?—"Faint heart never won fair lady." If Mr. Knowle had had a faint heart, he would never have won me. Seven times I refused him, and seven times he came again—like Jacob. The eighth time he drew out a revolver, and threatened to shoot himself. I was shaking like an aspen leaf. Suddenly I realized that I loved him. "Henry," I said, "I am yours." He took me in his arms—putting down the revolver first, of course. I have never regretted my surrender, Mr. Coote. (*With a sigh.*) Ah, me! We women are strange creatures.

BOBBY. I don't believe Sandy would mind if I did shoot myself.

MRS. KNOWLE. Oh, don't say that, Mr. Coote. She is very warm-hearted. I'm sure it would upset her a good deal. Oh no, you are taking too gloomy a view of the situation, I am sure of it.

BOBBY. Well, I shan't shoot myself, but I shan't propose to her again. I know when I'm not wanted.

MRS. KNOWLE. But we do want you, Mr. Coote. Both my husband and I—

BOBBY. I say, I'd much rather not talk about it, if you don't mind. I practically promised her that I wouldn't say anything to you this time.

MRS. KNOWLE. What, not say anything to her only mother? But how should I know if I were to call you "Bobby," or not?

BOBBY. Well, of course—I mean I haven't really said anything, have I? Nothing she'd really mind. She's so funny about things.

MRS. KNOWLE. She is indeed, Mr. Coote. I don't know where she gets it from. Neither Henry nor I are in the least funny. It was all the result of being christened in that irreligious way—I quite thought he said Millicent—and reading all those books, instead of visiting the sick as I used to do. I was quite a little Red Riding Hood until Henry sprang at me so fiercely. (*MR. KNOWLE and JANE come in by the window, and she turns round towards them. JANE goes to chair C. and sits, after putting the chair straight. MR. KNOWLE goes to settee R. and sits reading a paper.*) Ah, there you both are. I was wondering where you had got to. Mr. Coote has been telling me all about his prospects in the city. So comforting. Jane, you didn't get your feet wet, I hope.

JANE. It's quite dry, Aunt Mary.

MR. KNOWLE. It's a most beautiful night, my dear. We've been talking to the fairies—haven't we, Jane?

MRS. KNOWLE. Well, as long as you didn't get cold. Did you see Sandy?

MR. KNOWLE. We didn't see anyone but Titania—and Peters. He had an appointment, apparently—but not with Titania.

JANE. He is walking out with Alice, I think.

MRS. KNOWLE. Well, Melisande will have to talk to Alice in the morning. I always warned you, Henry, about the danger of having an unmarried chauffeur on the premises. I always felt it was a mistake.

MR. KNOWLE. Apparently, my dear, Peters feels as strongly about it as you. He is doing his best to remedy the error.

MRS. KNOWLE (*rising and moving up c.* BOBBY *rises also*). Well, I must be going to bed. I have been through a good deal to-night; more than any of you know about.

MR. KNOWLE (*cheerfully*). What's the matter, my love? Indigestion?

MRS. KNOWLE. Beyond saying that it is not indigestion, Henry, my lips are sealed. I shall suffer my cross—my mental cross—in silence.

JANE. Shall I come with you, Aunt Mary?

MRS. KNOWLE (c.). In five minutes, dear. (*To Heaven*) My only daughter has left me, and gone into the night. Fortunately my niece has offered to help me out of my—to help me. (*Holding out her hand.*) Good night, Mr. Coote.

BOBBY (*going to her*). Good night, Mrs. Knowle.

MRS. KNOWLE. Good night! And remember (*in a loud whisper*) what Shakespeare said. (*She presses his hand and holds it.*) Good night! Good night! . . . Good night!

(BOBBY *goes up to door L.*)

MR. KNOWLE (*rising*). Shakespeare said so many things. Among others, he said, "Good night, good night, parting is such sweet sorrow, that I could say good night till it be morrow." (MRS. KNOWLE *looks at him severely, and then, without saying anything, goes over to him and holds up her cheek.*) Good night, my dear. (*He kisses her.*) Sleep well. (*He sits down again.*)

MRS. KNOWLE. In five minutes, Jane.

JANE. Yes, Aunt Mary.

(MRS. KNOWLE *goes to the door L., BOBBY opens it for her.*)

MRS. KNOWLE (*at the door*). I shall *not* sleep well. I shall lie awake all night. Dr. Anderson will be very much distressed. "Dr. Anderson," I shall say, "it is not your fault. I lay awake all night, thinking of my loved ones." In five minutes, Jane.

(*She goes out.*)

(BOBBY *moves to the casement after shutting the door.*)

MR. KNOWLE (*rising*). An exacting programme. Well, I shall be in the library, if anybody wants to think of me—or say good night to me—or anything like that.

JANE (L.C.). Then I'd better say good night to you now, Uncle Henry. (*She goes up to him.*)

MR. KNOWLE (*kissing her*). Good night, dear.

JANE. Good night.

MR. KNOWLE. If there's anybody else who wants to kiss me— (*moving up to BOBBY*) what about you, Bobby? Or will you come into the library and have a smoke first?

BOBBY. Oh, I shall be going to bed directly, I think. Rather tired to-day, somehow.

MR. KNOWLE. Then good night to you also. Dear me, what a business this is. Sandy has left us for ever, I understand. If she should come back, Jane, and wishes to kiss the top of my head, she will find it in the library—just above the back of the arm chair, nearest the door.

(*He goes out L.*)

JANE (*sitting on settee R.*). Did Sandy go out into the garden?

BOBBY (*gloomily, coming down below settee L.*). Yes—about five minutes ago.

JANE (*timidly, after a pause*). I'm so sorry, Bobby.

BOBBY (*walking slowly up c.*). Thanks, it's awfully decent of you. (*After a pause.*) Don't let's talk about it.

JANE. Of course I won't if it hurts you, Bobby. But I felt I had to say something, I felt so sorry. You didn't mind, did you?

BOBBY. It's awfully decent of you to mind. (*Going to mirror up R.*)

JANE (*gently*). I mind very much when my friends are unhappy.

BOBBY. Thanks awfully. (*He buttons his coat, and looks at himself.*) I say, do you see anything wrong with it? (*Coming down c.*)

JANE. Wrong with what?

BOBBY. My clothes. (*He revolves slowly.*)

JANE. Of course not. They fit beautifully.

BOBBY. Sandy's so funny about things. I don't know what she means half the time.

JANE. Of course, I'm very fond of Melisande, but I do see what you mean. She's so (*searching for the right word*)—so romantic.

BOBBY (*eagerly*). Yes, that's just it. It takes a bit of living up to. I say, have a cigarette, won't you? (*He takes out his case.*)

JANE. No, thank you. (*BOBBY sits on the settee near to JANE.*) Of course, I'm very fond of Melisande, but I do feel sometimes that I don't altogether envy the man who marries her.

BOBBY. I say, do you really feel that?

JANE. Yes. She's too (*getting the right word at last*)—too romantic.

BOBBY. You're about right, you know. I mean she talks about doing deeds of derring-do. Well, I mean that's all very well, but when one marries and settles down—you know what I mean?

JANE. Exactly. That's just how I feel about it. As I said to Melisande only this evening, this is the twentieth century. Well, I happen to like the twentieth century. That's all.

BOBBY. I see what you mean.

JANE. It may be very unromantic of me, but I like men to be keen on games, and to wear the clothes that everybody else wears—as long as they fit well, of course—and to talk about the ordinary things that everybody talks about. Of course, Melisande would say that that was very stupid and unromantic of me—

BOBBY. I don't think it is at all.

JANE. How awfully nice of you to say that, Bobby. You do understand so wonderfully.

BOBBY (*with a laugh*). I say, that's rather funny. I was just thinking the same about you.

JANE. I say, were you really? I'm so glad. I like to feel that we are really friends, and that we understand each other. I don't know whether I'm different from other girls, but I don't make friends very easily.

BOBBY. Do you mean men or women friends?

JANE. Both. In fact, but for Melisande and you, I can hardly think of any—not what you call real friends.

BOBBY. Melisande is a great friend, isn't she? You tell each other all your secrets, and that sort of thing, don't you?

JANE. Yes, we're great friends, but there are some things that I could never tell even her. (*Impressively.*) I could never show her my inmost heart.

BOBBY. I don't believe about your not having any men friends. I bet there are hundreds of them, as keen on you as anything.

JANE. I wonder. It would be rather nice to think there were. That sounds horrid, doesn't it, but a girl can't help wanting to be liked.

BOBBY. Of course she can't; nobody can. I don't think it's a bit horrid.

JANE. How nice of you. (*She gets up and moves c.*) Well, I must be going, I suppose.

BOBBY. What's the hurry? (*Rises also.*)

JANE. Aunt Mary. She said five minutes. (*She goes up L.*)

BOBBY (*coming towards JANE*). And how long will you be with her? You'll come down again, won't you?

JANE. No, I don't think so. I'm rather tired this evening. (*Holding out her hand.*) Good night, Bobby.

BOBBY (*taking it*). Oh, but look here, I'll come and light your candle for you.

JANE. How nice of you!

(*She manages to get her hand back.*)

BOBBY (*crossing her to the door*). I suppose I may as well go to bed myself.

JANE. Well, if you are, we'd better put the lights out.

BOBBY. Righto. (*He puts them out by means of the switch above*

the door.) I say, what a night! (*The moonlight streams through the windows on them.*) You'll hardly want a candle.

(*BOBBY opens and holds the door for her and they go out together.*)

(*The hall is empty. Suddenly the front door bell is heard to ring. After a little interval, ALICE comes in L., turns on the light, and looks round the hall. She is walking across the hall to the drawing-room when MR. KNOWLE comes in from behind her, and she turns round.*)

MR. KNOWLE (C.). Were you looking for me, Alice?

ALICE (R.C.). Yes, sir. There's a gentleman at the front door, sir.

MR. KNOWLE. Rather late for a call, isn't it?

ALICE. He's in a motor-car, sir, and it's broken down, and he wondered if you'd lend him a little petrol. He told me to say how very sorry he was to trouble you—

MR. KNOWLE. But he's not troubling me at all—particularly if Peters is about. I dare say you could find Peters, Alice, and if it's not troubling Peters too much, perhaps he would see to it. (*Moving to the settee R.*) And ask the gentleman to come in. We can't keep him standing on the door-mat.

ALICE. Yes, sir. (*Going L.*) I did ask him before, sir.

MR. KNOWLE. Well, ask him this time in the voice of one who is about to bring in the whisky.

ALICE. Yes, sir. (*Goes to door L.*)

MR. KNOWLE (*sitting on settee R.*). And then—bring in the whisky.

ALICE. Yes, sir. (*She goes out, and returns a moment later and comes to L.C.*) He says, thank you very much, sir, but he really won't come in, and he's very sorry indeed to trouble you about the petrol.

MR. KNOWLE. Ah! I'm afraid we were too allusive for him.

ALICE (*hopefully*). Yes, sir.

MR. KNOWLE. Well, we won't be quite so subtle this time. Present Mr. Knowle's compliments, and say that I shall be very much honoured if he will drink a glass of whisky with me before proceeding on his journey.

ALICE. Yes, sir. (*She turns to the door again.*)

MR. KNOWLE. And then—bring in the whisky.

ALICE. Yes, sir. (*She goes out. In a little while she comes back followed by the stranger, who is dressed from head to foot in a long cloak.*) Mr. Gervase Mallory.

(*She goes out.*)

MR. KNOWLE (*rising*). How-do-you-do, Mr. Mallory? I'm very glad to see you. (*They shake hands C.*)

GERVASE. It's very kind of you. I really must apologize for bothering you like this. I'm afraid I'm being an awful nuisance.

MR. KNOWLE. Not at all. Are you going far?

GERVASE. Collingham. I live at Little Malling, about twenty miles away. Do you know it?

MR. KNOWLE. Yes. I've been through it. I didn't know it was as far away as that.

GERVASE (*with a laugh*). Well, perhaps only by the way I came. The fact is I've lost myself rather.

MR. KNOWLE. I'm afraid you have. Collingham. You oughtn't to have come within five miles of us.

GERVASE. I suppose I oughtn't.

MR. KNOWLE. Well, all the more reason for having a drink now that you *are* here.

GERVASE. It's awfully kind of you.

(ALICE comes in and goes to the table at the head of the settee L.)

MR. KNOWLE. Ah, here we are. (ALICE puts down the whisky.) You've told Peters?

ALICE. Yes, sir. He's looking after it now.

MR. KNOWLE. That's right. (ALICE goes out.) You'll have some whisky, won't you? (*Coming to the table.*)

GERVASE. Thanks very much.

MR. KNOWLE. And do take your coat off, won't you, and make yourself comfortable?

GERVASE. Er—thanks. I don't think—

(*He smiles to himself and keeps his cloak on.*)

MR. KNOWLE (*busy with the drinks*). Say when.

GERVASE. Thank you.

MR. KNOWLE. And soda?

GERVASE. Please. . . . Thanks!

(*He takes the glass.*)

MR. KNOWLE (*looking up*). But do take your coat off, won't you, and sit down and be comfortable?

GERVASE. Er—thanks very much, but I don't think— (*With a shrug and a smile.*) Oh, well!

MR. KNOWLE (*giving himself a drink*). I'm so glad you came, because I have a horror of drinking alone. Even when my wife gives me cough-mixture (*Goes to settee R.*), I insist on somebody else in the house having cough-mixture too. A glass of cough-mixture with an old friend just before going to bed— (*He sits on settee R.*)

(*During MR. KNOWLE'S sentence GERVASE has put down his glass and taken off his cloak. He is in fancy dress—the wonderful young Prince in blue and gold of MELISANDE'S dream. He comes down to chair C. and sits. Just as he sits, MR. KNOWLE looks at him in amazement.*)

MR. KNOWLE (*pointing to his whisky glass*). But I haven't even begun it yet. . . . Perhaps it's the port.

GERVASE (*laughing*). I'm awfully sorry. You must wonder what on earth I'm doing.

MR. KNOWLE. No, no; I wondered what on earth I'd been doing.

GERVASE. You see, I'm going to a fancy dress dance at Collingham.

MR. KNOWLE. You relieve my mind considerably.

GERVASE. That's why I didn't want to come in—or take my cloak off.

MR. KNOWLE (*inspecting him*). It becomes you extraordinarily well, if I may say so.

GERVASE. Oh, thanks very much. But one feels rather absurd in it when other people are in ordinary clothes.

MR. KNOWLE. On the contrary, you make other people feel absurd. I don't know that that particular style would have suited me, but (*looking at himself*) I am sure that I could have found something more expressive of my emotions than this.

GERVASE. You're quite right. "Dress does make a difference, Davy."

MR. KNOWLE. It does indeed.

GERVASE. I feel it's almost wicked of me to be drinking a whisky and soda.

MR. KNOWLE. Very wicked. (*Taking out his case.*) Have a cigarette, too?

GERVASE. May I have one of my own?

MR. KNOWLE. Do.

GERVASE (*feeling for it*). If I can find it. (*Putting glass on table.*) They were very careless about pockets in the old days. I had a special one put in somewhere, only it's rather difficult to get at. . . . Ah, here it is. (*He takes a cigarette from his case, and after trying to put the case back in his pocket again, places it on the table.*)

MR. KNOWLE (*rising*). Match?

GERVASE (*rising*). Thanks. (*Picking up his whisky.*) Well, here's luck, and—my most grateful thanks.

MR. KNOWLE (*raising his glass and sitting again on settee B*). May you slay all your dragons.

GERVASE. Thank you. (*He sits.*)

(*They drink.*)

MR. KNOWLE. Well, now about Collingham. I don't know if you saw a map outside in the hall.

GERVASE. I saw it, but I am afraid I didn't look at it. I was too much interested in your prints.

MR. KNOWLE (*eagerly*). You don't say that you are interested in prints?

GERVASE. Very much—as an entire amateur.

MR. KNOWLE. Most of the young men who come here think that the art began and ended with Kirchner. If you are really interested, I have something in the library—but of course I mustn't

take up your time now. If you could bear to come over another day—after all, we are neighbours—

GERVASE. It's awfully nice of you; I should love it.

MR. KNOWLE. Hedgling is the name of the village. I mention it because you seem to have lost your way so completely—

GERVASE. Oh, by Jove, now I know where I am. It's so different in the moonlight. I'm lunching this way to-morrow. Might I come on afterwards? And then I can return your petrol, thank you for your hospitality, and expose my complete ignorance of old prints, all in one afternoon.

MR. KNOWLE. Well, but you must come anyhow. Come to tea.

GERVASE. That will be ripping. (*Getting up.*) Well, I suppose I ought to be getting on. (*He picks up his cloak and goes up L.C.*)

MR. KNOWLE. We might just have a look at that map on the way. (*Going L.*)

GERVASE. Oh yes, do let's.

(*They go to the door together, and stand for a moment looking at the casement windows.*)

MR. KNOWLE (*at the switch*). It really is a wonderful night. (*He switches off the lights, and the moon streams through the windows.*) Just look.

GERVASE (*with a deep sigh*). Wonderful!

(*They go out together.*)

(*The hall is empty for a moment. Voices are heard. Then GERVASE reappears. He has forgotten his cigarette-case. He goes to the table.*)

(*MELISANDE comes in by the French windows. He hears her, and at the same moment she sees him. She gives a little wondering cry. It is He! The knight of her dreams. They stand gazing at each other. . . . Silently he makes obeisance to her; silently she acknowledges it.*)

(*The CURTAIN descends.*)



ACT II

It is seven o'clock on a beautiful midsummer morning. The scene is a glade in a wood a little way above the village of Hedgling. A clock chimes seven.

GERVASE MALLORY, *still in his fancy dress, but with his cloak on, comes in* R.U.E. *He looks round him and says, "By Jove, how jolly!" He takes off his cloak, throws it down on bank* L.C., *stretches himself, turns round, and, seeing the view behind him, goes to look at it. While he is looking he hears an unmelodious whistling. He turns round with a start; the whistling goes on; he says "Good Lord!" and tries to get to his cloak. It is too late. ERN, a very small boy, comes through the trees* L. *into the glade. GERVASE gives a sigh of resignation and stands there. ERN stops in the middle of his tune and gazes at him.*

ERN (L.). Oo—er! Oo! (*He circles slowly round GERVASE.*)
Oo! Look! (*Now R.C.*)

GERVASE. Yes, it is a bit dressy, isn't it? Come round to the back (*ERN moves round to the back*)—take a good look at it while you can. That's right. . . . Been all round? Good!

ERN. Oo!

GERVASE. Well, I can't go on standing here while you say "Oo." Do you mind if I sit down? (*GERVASE is R.C. and ERN L.C.*) I gather that I have your consent. I thank you. (*Sits on bank R.*)

ERN. Oo! Look! (*He follows up and points at GERVASE'S legs and then sits on ground.*)

GERVASE. What is it now? My legs? Oh, but surely you've noticed those before?

ERN. Oo!

GERVASE. Really, I don't understand you. I came up here for a walk in a perfectly ordinary blue suit, and you do nothing but say "Oo." What does your father wear when he's ploughing? I suppose you don't walk all round *him* and say "Oo!" By the way, I wish you'd tell me your name. (*ERN gazes at him dumbly.*) Oh, come! They must have told you your name when you got up this morning.

ERN (*smiling sheepishly*). Ern.

GERVASE (*bowing*). How-do-you-do? I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Hearne. My name is Mallory. (*ERN grins.*) Thank you.

ERN (*tapping himself*). I'm Ern.

GERVASE. Yes, I'm Mallory, Ern. We can't keep on saying this to each other, you know, because then we never get any farther. Once an introduction is over, Mr. Hearne, we are——

ERN. Ern.

GERVASE. Yes, I know. I was very glad to hear it. But now—— Oh, I see what you mean. Ern—short for Ernest?

ERN (*nodding*). They calls me Ern.

GERVASE. That's very friendly of them. Being more of a stranger I shall call you Ernest. Well, Ernest (*getting up*)—just excuse me a moment, will you? Very penetrating bark this tree has. It must be a Pomeranian. (*He folds his cloak upon it and sits down again.*) That's better. Now we can talk comfortably together. I don't know if there's anything you particularly want to discuss—nothing?—well, then, I will suggest the subject of breakfast.

ERN (*grinning*). 'Ad my breakfast.

GERVASE. You've had yours? You selfish brute! . . .

ERN. Bacon fat. (*He makes reminiscent noises.*)

GERVASE. Don't keep on going through all the courses. Well, what happened was this. My car broke down. I suppose you never had a motor-car of your own.

ERN. Don't like moty-cars.

GERVASE. Well, really, after last night I'm inclined to agree with you. Well, no, I oughtn't to say that, because, if it hadn't broken down, I should never have seen Her. Ernest, I don't know if you're married or anything of that sort, but I think even your rough stern heart would have been moved by that vision of loveliness which I saw last night. (*He is silent for a little, thinking of her.*) Well, then, I lost my way. There I was—ten miles from anywhere—in the middle of what was supposed to be a short cut—late at night—Midsummer Night—what would you have done, Ernest?

ERN. Gone 'ome.

GERVASE. Don't be silly. How could I go home when I didn't know where home was, and it was a hundred miles away, and I'd just seen the Princess? No, I did what your father or your Uncle George or any wise man would have done, I sat in the car and thought of Her.

ERN. Oo!

GERVASE. You are surprised? Ah, but if you'd seen her. . . . Have you ever been alone in the moonlight on Midsummer Night—I don't mean just for a minute or two, but all through the night until the dawn came? You aren't really alone, you know. All round you there are little whisperings going on, little breathings, little rustlings. Somebody is out hunting; somebody stirs in his sleep as he dreams again the hunt of yesterday; somebody up in the tree-tops pipes suddenly to the dawn, and then, finding that the dawn has not come, puts his silly little head back under his

wing and goes to sleep again. . . . And the fairies are out. Do you believe in fairies, Ernest? You would have believed in them last night. I heard them whispering.

ERN. Oo!

GERVASE (*coming out of his thoughts with a laugh*). Well, of course, I can't expect you to believe me. But don't go about thinking that there's nothing in the world but bacon fat and bull's-eyes. Well, then, I suppose I went to sleep, for I woke up suddenly and it was morning, the most wonderful sparkling magical morning—but, of course, *you* were just settling down to your bacon fat then.

ERN. Oo! (*He makes more reminiscent noises.*)

GERVASE. Yes, that's just what I said. I said to myself, breakfast.

ERN. 'Ad my breakfast.

GERVASE. Yes, but I 'adn't. I said to myself, "Surely my old friend, Ernest, whom I used to shoot bison with in the Himalayas, has got an estate somewhere in these parts. I will go and share his simple meal with him." So I got out of the car, and I did what you didn't do, young man, I had a bathe in the river, and then a dry on a pocket-handkerchief—one of my sister's, unfortunately—and then I came out to look for breakfast. And suddenly, whom should I meet but my old friend, Ernest, the same hearty fellow, the same inveterate talker as when we shot dragon-flies together in the swamps of Malay. (*Shaking his hand.*) Ernest, old boy, pleased to meet you. What about breakfast?

ERN. 'Ad my—

GERVASE. S'sh. Now then—to business. Do you mind looking the other way while I try to find my purse. (*Feeling for it.*) Every morning when you get up, you should say, "Thank God, I'm getting a big boy now and I've got pockets in my trousers." And you should feel very sorry for the poor people who lived in fairy books and had no trousers to put pockets in. Ah, here we are. Now then, Ernest, attend very carefully. Where do you live?

ERN. 'Ome.

GERVASE. You mean, you haven't got a flat of your own yet? Well, how far away is your home? (*ERN grins and says nothing.*) A mile? (*ERN continues to grin.*) Half a mile? (*ERN grins.*) Six inches?

ERN (*pointing L.*). Down there.

GERVASE. Good. Now then, I want you to take this—(*giving him half-a-crown*)—

ERN. Oo! (*Rises.*)

GERVASE (*rises*). Yes, I thought that would move you—and I want you to ask your mother if you can bring me some breakfast up here. Now, listen very carefully, because we are coming to the important part. Hard-boiled eggs, bread, butter, and a bottle of milk—and anything else she likes. Tell her that it's most important, because your old friend Mallory whom you shot white mice with

in Egypt is starving by the roadside. And if you come back here with a basket quickly, I'll give you as many bull's-eyes as you can eat in a week. (*Very earnestly.*) Now, Ernest, with all the passion and emotion of which I am capable before breakfast, I ask you: have you got that?

ERN (*nodding*). Going 'ome. (*He looks at the half-crown again.*)

GERVASE. Going 'ome. Yes. But—returning with breakfast. Starving man—lost in forest—return with basket—save life. (*To himself.*) I believe I could explain it better to a Chinaman. (*To ERN.*) Now then, off you go.

ERN (*as he is going off L. turns half-way*). Oo!

GERVASE (*nodding to him*). Yes, I'm still "Oo."

ERN (*as he goes off L.*). 'Ad my breakfast.

GERVASE. Yes, and I wonder if I shall get mine.

(*SUSAN starts singing off stage.*)

SUSAN (*singing*)—

Jog on, jog on the footpath way and merrily hent the stile, ah!
A merry heart goes all the day, your sad tires in a mile, ah!

(*GERVASE walks slowly after ERN and stands looking at him as he goes down the hill. Then, turning round, he hears the other stranger in the distance.*)

GERVASE. Hullo, here's another of them. (*He walks towards the bank R.*) Horribly crowded the country's getting nowadays. (*He puts on his cloak, waits down R.*)

(*A moment later a travelling Pedlar, name of SUSAN, comes in singing, R.U.E. He sees GERVASE.*)

SUSAN (*L.C. with a bow*). Good morning, sir.

GERVASE (*looking round*). Good morning.

SUSAN. I had thought to be alone. I trust my singing did not discommode you.

GERVASE. Not at all. I like it. Do go on.

SUSAN. Alas, the song ends there.

GERVASE. Oh, well, couldn't we have it again?

SUSAN. Perhaps later, sir, if you insist. (*Taking off his box.*) Would it inconvenience you if I rested here for a few minutes? (*Sitting L.C.*)

GERVASE. Not a bit. It's a jolly place to rest at, isn't it? Have you come far this morning? (*Sits on bank R.O.*)

SUSAN. Three or four miles—a mere nothing on a morning like this. Besides, what does the Great William say?

GERVASE. I don't think I know him. What does he say?

SUSAN. A merry heart goes all the way, your sad tires in a mile, ah!

GERVASE. Oh, Shakespeare, yes.

SUSAN. And why, you ask, am I merry?

GERVASE. Well, I didn't, but I was just going to. Why are you merry?

SUSAN. Can you not guess? What does the Great Ralph say?

GERVASE (*trying hard*). The Great Ralph. . . . No, you've got me there. I'm sure I don't know him. Well, what does he say?

SUSAN. Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of Empires ridiculous.

GERVASE. Emerson, of course. Silly of me.

SUSAN. So you see, sir—I am well, the day is well, all is well.

GERVASE. Sir, I congratulate you. In the words of the Great Percy—(*to himself*) that's got him.

SUSAN (*at a loss*). The—er—Great Percy?

GERVASE. Hail to thee, blithe spirit! (*Rises and goes up c.*)

SUSAN (*eagerly*). I take you, I take you! Shelley! Ah, there's a poet, Mr.—er—I don't think I quite caught your name.

GERVASE (*coming down c.*). Oh! My name's Gervase Mallory—to be referred to by posterity, I hope, as the Great Gervase.

SUSAN. Not a poet, too?

GERVASE. Well, no, not professionally.

SUSAN. But one with the poets in spirit—like myself. I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Mallory. It is most good-natured of you to converse with me. My name is Susan. (*GERVASE bows.*) Generally called Master Susan in these parts, or sometimes Gentleman Susan. I am a travelling Pedlar by profession.

GERVASE (*sitting again*). A delightful profession, I am sure.

SUSAN (*opening his box*). The most delightful of all professions. (*He lifts up his box.*) Speaking professionally for the moment, if I may so far venture, you are not in any need of boot-laces, buttons, or collar-studs?

GERVASE (*smiling*). Well, no, not at this actual moment. On almost any other day perhaps—but no, not this morning. (*Rises.*)

SUSAN. I only just mentioned it in passing—*en passant*, as the French say. (*He brings out a paper bag and begins to undo his breakfast.*) Would the fact of my eating my breakfast in this pleasant resting-place detract at all from your appreciation of the beautiful day which Heaven has sent us?

GERVASE. Eating your *what*? (*Goes up above SUSAN.*)

SUSAN. My simple breakfast. (*He brings out his breakfast of bread and cheese.*)

GERVASE (*shaking his head*). I'm very sorry, but I really don't think I could bear it. Only five minutes ago Ernest—I don't know if you know Ernest?

SUSAN. The Great Ernest?

GERVASE (*indicating with his hand*). No, the very small one—Well, *he* was telling me all about the breakfast he'd just had, and now *you're* showing me the breakfast you're just going to have—no, I can't bear it. (*Goes up stage.*)

SUSAN. My dear sir, you don't mean to tell me that you would do me the honour of joining me at my simple repast ?

GERVASE (*coming down excitedly*). The honour of joining you !—the honour ! My dear Mr. Susan ! Now I know why they call you Gentleman Susan. (*Shaking his head sadly*.) But no. It wouldn't be fair to you. I should eat too much. Besides, Ernest may come back. No, I will wait. It wouldn't be fair. (*Goes down R.*)

SUSAN (*having got out his knife*). Bacon or cheese ?

GERVASE (*turns up stage*). Cheese—I mean bacon—I mean—I say, you aren't serious ?

SUSAN (*handing him bread and cheese*). I trust you will find it up to your expectations.

GERVASE (*kneeling and taking it*). I say, you really—(*Solemnly*.) Master Susan, with all the passion and emotion of which I am capable before breakfast, I say "Thank you." (*He takes a bite and stands*.) Thank you.

SUSAN (*eating also*). Please do not mention it. I am more than repaid by your company.

GERVASE. It is charming of you to say so, and I am very proud to be your guest, but I beg you to allow me to pay for this delightful cheese. (*Sits on bank R.*)

SUSAN. No, no. I couldn't hear of it.

GERVASE. I warn you that if you will not allow me to pay for this delightful cheese, I shall insist on buying all your boot-laces. Nay, more, I shall buy all your studs, and all your buttons. Your profession would then be gone.

SUSAN (*cutting bread*). Well, well, shall we say tuppence ?

GERVASE. Tuppence for a banquet like this ? My dear friend, nothing less than half-a-crown will satisfy me.

SUSAN. Sixpence. Not a penny more.

GERVASE (*rises, with a sigh*). Very well, then. (*He begins to feel in his pocket, and in so doing reveals part of his dress. SUSAN opens his eyes at it, and then goes on eating. GERVASE finds his purse and produces sixpence, which he gives to SUSAN.*) Sir, I thank you. (*He resumes his breakfast.*)

SUSAN. You are too generous. . . . Forgive me for asking, but you are not by chance a fellow-traveller upon the road ?

GERVASE. Do you mean professionally ?

SUSAN. Yes. There is a young fellow, a contortionist and sword-swallower who travels from village to village, known locally in these parts as Humphrey the Human Hiatus. Just for a moment I wondered—

(*He glances at GERVASE's legs, which are uncovered. GERVASE hastily wraps his coat round them.*)

GERVASE. I am not Humphrey. No. Gervase the Cheese Swallower. . . . Er—my costume—

SUSAN. Please say nothing more. It was ill-mannered of me to have inquired. Let a man wear what he likes. It is a free world.

GERVASE. Well, the fact is, I have been having a bathe.

SUSAN (*with a bow*). I congratulate you on your bathing costume.

GERVASE. Not at all. (*Sits.*)

SUSAN. You live near here then ?

GERVASE. Little Malling. I came over in a car.

SUSAN. Little Malling ? That's about twenty miles away.

GERVASE. Oh, much more than that surely.

SUSAN. No. There's Hedgling down there. (*Points L.*)

GERVASE (*surprised*). Hedgling ? Heavens, how I must have lost my way. . . . Then I have been within a mile of her all night. And I never knew !

SUSAN. You are married, Mr. Mallory ?

GERVASE. No. Not yet.

SUSAN. Get married.

GERVASE. What ?

SUSAN. Take my advice and get married.

GERVASE. You recommend it ?

SUSAN. I do. . . . There is no companion like a wife, if you marry the right woman.

GERVASE. Oh ?

SUSAN. I have been married thirty years. Thirty years of happiness.

GERVASE. But in your profession you must go away from your wife a good deal.

SUSAN (*smiling*). But then I come back to her a good deal.

GERVASE (*thoughtfully*). Yes, that must be rather jolly.

SUSAN. Why do you think I welcomed your company so much when I came upon you here this morning ?

GERVASE (*modestly*). Oh, well—

SUSAN. It is something to tell my wife when I get back to her. When you are married, every adventure becomes two adventures. You have your adventure, and then you go back to your wife and have your adventure again. Perhaps it is a better adventure that second time. You can say the things which you didn't quite say the first time, and do the things which you didn't quite do. When my week's travels are over, and I go back to my wife, I shall have a whole week's happenings to tell her. They won't lose in the telling, Mr. Mallory. Our little breakfast here this morning—she will love to hear about that. I can see her happy, excited face as I tell her all that I said to you, and—if I can remember it—all that you said to me.

GERVASE (*eagerly*). I say, how jolly ! (*Thoughtfully.*) You won't forget what I said about the Great Percy ? I thought that was rather good.

SUSAN. I hope it wasn't too good, Mr. Mallory. If it was, I shall find myself telling it to her as one of my own remarks. That's

why I say "Get married." Then you can make things fair for yourself. You can tell her all the good things of mine which you said.

GERVASE. But there must be more in marriage than that.

SUSAN. There are a million things in marriage, but companionship is at the bottom of it all. . . . Do you know what companionship means?

GERVASE. How do you mean? Literally?

SUSAN. The derivation of it in the dictionary. It means the art of having meals with a person. Cynics talk of the impossibility of sitting opposite the same woman every day at breakfast. Impossible to *them*, perhaps, poor shallow-hearted creatures, but not impossible to two people who have found what love is.

GERVASE. It doesn't sound very romantic.

SUSAN (*solemnly*). It is the most romantic thing in the whole world. . . . Some more cheese?

GERVASE (*taking it and rising*). Thank you. . . . (*With his mouth full.*) Do you believe in love at first sight, Master Susan?

SUSAN. Why not? If it's the woman you love at first sight, not only the face.

GERVASE (*walking down R.*). I see. (*After a pause.*) It's rather hard to tell, you know. I suppose the proper thing to do is to ask her to have breakfast with you, and see how you get on.

(SUSAN packs up the breakfast.)

SUSAN. Well, you might do worse.

GERVASE (*laughing*). And propose to her after breakfast? (*Sits on the front of the bank.*)

SUSAN (*puts package in box*). If you will. It is better than proposing to her at a ball as some young people do, carried away suddenly by a snatched kiss in the moonlight.

GERVASE (*shaking his head*). Nothing like that happened last night.

SUSAN (*closing box*). What does the Great Alfred say of the kiss?

GERVASE. I never read the *Daily Mail*.

SUSAN. Tennyson, Mr. Mallory, Tennyson.

GERVASE. Oh, I beg your pardon.

SUSAN. "The kiss," says the Great Alfred, "the woven arms, seem but to be weak symbols of the settled bliss, the comfort, I have found in thee." The same idea, Mr. Mallory. Companionship, or the art of having breakfast with a person. (*Getting up.*) Well, I must be moving on. We have been companions for a short time; I thank you for it. I wish you well.

GERVASE (*getting up*). I say, I've been awfully glad to meet you. And I shall never forget the breakfast you gave me.

SUSAN (*doing up his box*). It is friendly of you to say so.

GERVASE (*hesitatingly*). You won't mind my having another

one when Ernest comes back—I mean, if Ernest comes back? (SUSAN *is putting his box on his back.*) You won't think I'm slighting yours in any way? But after an outdoor bathe, you know, one does——

SUSAN. Please! I am happy to think you have such an appetite.

GERVASE (*holding out his hand*). Well, good-bye, Mr. Susan. (SUSAN *looks at his hand doubtfully, and GERVASE says with a laugh.*) Oh, come on!

SUSAN (*shaking it*). Good-bye, Mr. Mallory.

GERVASE (*holding hands*). And I shan't forget what you said.

SUSAN (*smiling*). I expect you will, Mr. Mallory. Good-bye.

(*He goes off L. singing.*)

GERVASE (*following L. and speaking after him*). Because it wasn't the moonlight, it wasn't really. It was just *Her*. (*To himself.*) It was just *Her*. . . . I suppose the great Whatsisname would say, "It was just *She*," but then, that isn't what I mean.

(GERVASE *watches him going down the hill. Then he turns to the other side, says "Hallo!" suddenly in great astonishment, and withdraws a few steps.*)

GERVASE. It can't be! (*He goes cautiously forward and looks again.*) It is!

(*He comes back, and walks gently off through the trees L.*)

(MELISANDE *comes in R.U.E. She has no hat; her hair is in two plaits to her waist; she is wearing a dress which might belong to any century. She stands in the middle of the glade, looks round it, holds out her hands to it for a moment, and then clasps them with a sigh of happiness. . . .*)

(GERVASE, *his cloak thrown away, comes in behind her. For a moment he is half-hidden by the trees.*)

GERVASE (L.C. *up stage, very softly*). Princess!

(*She hears but thinks she is still dreaming. She smiles a little.*)

GERVASE (*a little more loudly and coming down*). Princess!

(*She listens and nods to herself. GERVASE comes to her L.*)

GERVASE. Princess!

(*She turns round.*)

MELISANDE (*looking at him wonderingly*). You!

GERVASE (*bowing*). At your service, Princess.

MELISANDE. It was you who came last night.

GERVASE. I was at your father's court last night. I saw you. You looked at me.

MELISANDE. I thought it was only a dream when I looked at

you. I thought it was a dream when you called me just now. Is it still a dream?

GERVASE. If it is a dream, let us go on dreaming.

MELISANDE. Where do you come from? Fairyland?

GERVASE. This is Fairyland. We are in the enchanted forest.

MELISANDE (*with a sigh of happiness*). Ah!

GERVASE. You have been looking for it?

MELISANDE. For so long. (*She is silent for a little, and then says with a smile.*) May one sit down in an enchanted forest?

GERVASE. Your throne awaits you. (*He points to the bank L.C.*)

MELISANDE (*going to and sitting on bank L.C.*). Thank you. . . . Won't you sit, too?

GERVASE (*moving R. and shaking his head*). I haven't finished looking at you yet. . . . You are very lovely, Princess.

MELISANDE. Am I?

GERVASE. Haven't they told you?

MELISANDE. Perhaps I wondered sometimes.

GERVASE (*going up c.*) Very lovely. . . . Have you a name which goes with it?

MELISANDE. My name is Melisande.

GERVASE (*his whole heart in it*). Melisande

MELISANDE (*content at last*). Ah!

GERVASE. Melisande! (*He sits on the grass near her. Solemnly.*) Now the Princess Melisande was very beautiful. (*He looks up at her and is silent for a little.*)

MELISANDE (*smiling shyly*). May we talk about you, now?

GERVASE. It is for the Princess to say what we shall talk about. If your Royal Highness commands, then I will even talk about myself.

MELISANDE. You see, I don't know your name yet.

GERVASE. I am called Gervase.

MELISANDE. Gervase. It is a pretty name.

GERVASE. I have been keeping it for this morning.

MELISANDE. It will be Prince Gervase, will it not, if this is Fairyland?

GERVASE. Alas, no. For I am only a humble woodcutter's son. One of seven.

MELISANDE. Of seven? I thought that humble woodcutters always had three sons, and that it was the youngest who went into the world to seek his fortune.

GERVASE. Three—that's right. I said "one of several." Now that I count them up, three. (*Counting on his fingers.*) Er—Bowshanks, er—Mulberry-face and myself. Three. I am the youngest.

MELISANDE. And the fairies came to your christening?

GERVASE. Now for the first time I think that they did.

MELISANDE (*nodding*). They always come to the christening of the third and youngest son, and they make him the tallest and the bravest and the most handsome.

GERVASE (*modestly*). Oh, well.

MELISANDE. You *are* the tallest and the bravest and the most handsome, aren't you?

GERVASE (*with a modest smile*). Well, of course, Mulberry-face is hardly a starter, and then Bowshanks—(*he indicates the curve of his legs*)—I mean, there's not much competition.

MELISANDE. I have no sisters.

GERVASE. The Princess never has sisters. She has suitors.

MELISANDE (*with a sigh*). Yes, she has suitors.

GERVASE (*taking out his dagger*). Tell me their names that I may remove them for you. (*Sharpens dagger on his boot.*)

MELISANDE. There is one dressed in black and white who seeks to win my hand.

GERVASE (*feeling the point*). He bites the dust to-morrow.

MELISANDE. To-morrow?

GERVASE. Unless it rains in the night. Perhaps it would be safer if we arranged for him to bite it this afternoon.

MELISANDE. How brave you are!

GERVASE. Say no more. It will be a pleasure. (*Bowing.*)

MELISANDE. Ah, but I cannot ask you to make this sacrifice for me.

GERVASE. The sacrifice will be his.

MELISANDE. But are you so certain that you will kill him? Suppose he were to kill you?

GERVASE (*getting up*). Madam, when the third son of a humble woodcutter engages in mortal combat with one upon whom the beautiful Princess has frowned, there can be but one end to the struggle. To doubt this would be to let Romance go.

MELISANDE. You are right. I should never have doubted.

GERVASE (*by tree R.C.*). At the same time, it would perhaps be as well to ask the help of my Uncle Otto.

MELISANDE. But is it fair to seek the assistance of an uncle in order to kill one small black and white suitor?

(GERVASE replaces the dagger.)

GERVASE. Ah, but he is a wizard. (MELISANDE *nods*.) One is always allowed to ask the help of a wizard. My idea was that he should cast a spell upon the presumptuous youth who seeks to woo you, so that to those who gazed upon him he should have the outward semblance of a rabbit. He would then realize the hopelessness of his suit and . . . go away.

MELISANDE (*with dignity*). I should certainly never marry a small black and white rabbit.

GERVASE. No, you couldn't, could you?

MELISANDE (*gravely*). No. (*Then their eyes meet. There is a sparkle in his; hers respond; and suddenly they are laughing together.*) What nonsense you talk!

GERVASE (*going down R.*). Well, it's such an absurdly fine morn-

ing, isn't it? There's a sort of sparkle in the air. (*Turns facing her.*) I'm really trying to be quite sensible.

MELISANDE (*making room for him at her feet*). Go on talking nonsense. (*He sits down on the ground and leans against the bank at her side.*) Tell me about yourself. You have told me nothing yet, but that (*she smiles at him*) your father is a woodcutter.

GERVASE. Yes. He—er—cuts wood.

MELISANDE. And you resolved to go out into the world and seek your fortune?

GERVASE. Yes. You see, if you are a third son of a humble woodcutter, nobody thinks very much of you at home, and they never take you out with them; and when you are cutting wood, they always put you where the sawdust gets into your mouth. Because, you see, they have never read history, and so they don't know that the third and youngest son is always the nicest of the family.

MELISANDE. And the tallest and the bravest and the most handsome.

GERVASE. *And all the other things you mention.*

MELISANDE. So you ran away?

GERVASE. So I ran away—to seek my fortune.

MELISANDE. But your uncle the wizard, or your godmother or somebody, gave you a magic ring to take with you on your travels? (*Nodding.*) They always do, you know.

GERVASE (*showing the ring on his finger*). Yes, my fairy godmother gave me a magic ring. Here it is.

MELISANDE (*looking at it*). What does it do?

GERVASE (*pointing to ring*). You turn it round once and think very hard of anybody you want, and suddenly the person you are thinking of appears before you.

MELISANDE. How wonderful! Have you tried it yet?

GERVASE. Once. . . . That's why you are here.

MELISANDE. Oh! (*Softly.*) Have you been thinking of me?

GERVASE. All night.

MELISANDE. I dreamed of you all night.

GERVASE (*happily*). Did you, Melisande? How dear of you to dream of me! (*Anxiously.*) Was I—was I all right?

MELISANDE. Oh, yes!

GERVASE (*pleased*). Ah! (*He spreads himself a little and removes a speck of dust from his sleeve.*)

MELISANDE (*thinking of it still*). You were so brave.

GERVASE. I'm generally a coward in my own dreams. I expect I'm pretty brave in other people's. Did I kill anybody?

MELISANDE. You were engaged in a terrible fight with a dragon when I woke up.

GERVASE. Leaving me and the dragon still asleep—I mean, still fighting? Oh, Melisande, how could you leave us until you knew who had won?

MELISANDE. I tried so hard to get back to you.

GERVASE. I expect I was winning, you know. I wish you could have got back for the finish. . . . (*Leaning towards her.*) Melisande, let me come into your dreams again to-night.

MELISANDE. You never asked me last night. You just came.

GERVASE. Thank you for letting me come.

MELISANDE. And then when I woke up early this morning, the world was so young, so beautiful, so fresh that I had to be with it. It called to me so clearly—to come out and find its secret. So I came up here, to this enchanted place, and all the way it whispered to me—wonderful things.

GERVASE. What did it whisper, Melisande?

MELISANDE. The secret of happiness.

GERVASE. Ah, what is it, Melisande? (*He sits up. She smiles and shakes her head.*) . . . I met a magician in the woods this morning.

MELISANDE. Did he speak to you?

GERVASE. *He told me* the secret of happiness.

MELISANDE. What did he tell you?

GERVASE. He said it was marriage.

MELISANDE. Ah, but he didn't mean by marriage what so many people mean.

GERVASE. He seemed a very potent magician.

MELISANDE. Marriage to many people means just food. House-keeping. *He didn't mean that.*

GERVASE. A very wise and reverend magician.

MELISANDE. Love is romance. Is there anything romantic in breakfast—or lunch?

GERVASE (*feelingly*). Well, not so much in lunch, of course, but

MELISANDE. How well you understand! Why do the others not understand?

GERVASE (*smiling at her*). Perhaps because they have not seen Melisande.

MELISANDE. Oh no, no, that isn't it. All the others—

GERVASE. Do you mean your suitors?

MELISANDE. Yes. They are so unromantic, so material. The clothes they wear; the things they talk about. But you are so different. Why is it?

GERVASE. I don't know. Perhaps because I am the third son of a woodcutter. Perhaps because they don't know that you are the Princess. Perhaps because they have never been in the enchanted forest.

MELISANDE. What would the forest tell them?

GERVASE (*leaning towards her*). All the birds in the forest are singing "Melisande"; the little brook runs through the forest murmuring "Melisande"; the tall trees bend their heads and whisper to each other "Melisande." All the flowers have put on their gay dresses for her. Oh, Melisande!

MELISANDE (*awed*). Is it true?

GERVASE. Is she not the Princess? (*They are silent for a little, happy to be together. . . . He looks back at her and gives a sudden little laugh.*)

MELISANDE. (*Gently*). What is it?

GERVASE. Just you and I—together—on the top of the world like this.

MELISANDE. Yes, that's what I feel, too. (*After a pause.*) Go on pretending.

GERVASE. Pretending?

MELISANDE. That the world is very young.

GERVASE. We are very young, Melisande.

MELISANDE (*timidly*). It is only a dream, isn't it?

GERVASE. Who knows what a dream is? Perhaps we fell asleep in Fairyland a thousand years ago, and all that we thought real was a dream, until now at last we are awake again.

MELISANDE. How wonderful that would be.

GERVASE. Perhaps we are dreaming now. But is it your dream or my dream, Melisande?

MELISANDE (*after thinking it out*). I think I would rather it were your dream, Gervase. For then I should be in it, and that would mean that you had been thinking of me.

GERVASE. Then it shall be *my* dream, Melisande.

MELISANDE. Let it be a long one, my dear.

GERVASE. For ever and for ever.

MELISANDE (*dreamily*). Oh, I know that it is only a dream, and that presently we shall wake up; or else that you will go away and I will go away, too, and we shall never meet again; for in the real world, what could I be to you, or you to me? So go on pretending.

(*He stands up and faces her.*)

GERVASE. Melisande, if this were Fairyland, or if we were knights and ladies in some old romance, would you trust yourself to me?

MELISANDE (*rising*). So very proudly.

GERVASE. You would let me come to your father's court and claim you over all your other suitors, and fight for you, and take you away with me?

MELISANDE. If this were Fairyland, yes. (*On the steps of the bank.*)

GERVASE. You would trust me?

MELISANDE. I would trust my lord.

GERVASE (*smiling at her*). Then I will come for the Princess this afternoon. (*With sudden feeling.*) Ah, how can I keep away now that I have seen the Princess?

MELISANDE (*L.C., shyly—happily*). When you saw me last night, did you know that you would see me again?

GERVASE (*C.*). I have been waiting for you here.

MELISANDE. How did you know that I would come?

GERVASE. On such a morning—in such a place—how could the loved one not be here?

MELISANDE (*looking away*). The loved one?

GERVASE. I saw you last night.

MELISANDE (*softly*). Was that enough?

GERVASE (*moving towards her*). Enough, yes. Enough? Oh no, no, no!

MELISANDE (*nodding*). I will wait for you this afternoon.

GERVASE. And you will come away with me? Out into the world with me? Over the hills and far away with me?

MELISANDE (*softly*). Over the hills and far away.

GERVASE. Princess!

MELISANDE. Not Princess. (*She puts out her hands.*)

GERVASE. Melisande!

MELISANDE. Ah!

GERVASE (*taking her hands*). May I kiss your hands, Melisande?

MELISANDE. They are my lord's to kiss.

GERVASE (*kissing them*). Dear hands.

MELISANDE. Now I shall love them, too.

GERVASE. May I kiss your lips, Melisande?

MELISANDE (*proudly*). Who shall, if not my lord?

GERVASE (*taking her in his arms*). Melisande! (*He touches her lips with his.*)

MELISANDE (*breaking away from him*). Oh!

GERVASE (*triumphantly*). I love you, Melisande! I love you!

MELISANDE (*facing the front wonderingly*). Why didn't I wake up when you kissed me? We are still here. The dream goes on.

GERVASE. It is no dream, Melisande. Or if it is a dream, then in my dream I love you, and if we are awake, then awake I love you. I love you if this is Fairyland, and if there is no Fairyland, then my love will make a faery land of the world for you. For I love you, Melisande.

MELISANDE (*timidly, turning to him*). Are we pretending still?

GERVASE. No, no, no!

(*She looks at him gravely for a moment and then nods her head.*)

MELISANDE (*pointing*). I live down there. You will come for me?

GERVASE. I will come.

MELISANDE. I am my lord's servant. I will wait for him. (*She goes up c. Then she turns to him and curtsies, saying*) This afternoon, my lord.

(*She goes down the hill.*)

(*He stands looking after her. While he is standing there, ERN comes through the trees with breakfast.*)

(*The CURTAIN comes down.*)

ACT III

It is about four o'clock in the afternoon of the same day. JANE is sitting on the sofa L. in the hall, glancing at a paper, but evidently rather bored with it, and hoping that somebody—BOBBY or somebody—will appear presently. However, it is MR. KNOWLE who passes the window and then comes in R.C.)

MR. KNOWLE (*coming c.*). Ah, Jane!

JANE (*looking up*). Hallo, Uncle Henry. Did you have a good day?

MR. KNOWLE. Well, Peters and I had a very enjoyable drive.

JANE. But you found nothing at the sale? What a pity!

MR. KNOWLE (*taking a catalogue from his pocket*). Nothing which I wanted myself, but there were several very interesting lots. Peters was strongly tempted by Lot 29—"Two hip-baths and a stuffed crocodile." Very useful things to have by you if you think of getting married, Jane, and setting up house for yourself. I don't know if you have any thoughts in that direction?

JANE (*a little embarrassed*). Well, I suppose I shall some day.

MR. KNOWLE. Ah! . . . Where's Bobby? (*Moves R.*)

JANE (*carelessly*). Bobby? Oh, he's about somewhere.

MR. KNOWLE (*turning*). I think Bobby would like to hear about Lot 29. (*Returning to his catalogue.*) Or perhaps Lot 42. "Lot 42—Twelve aspidistras, towel-horse, and 'The Maiden's Prayer.'" All for seven and sixpence. I ought to have had Bobby with me. He could have made a firm offer of eight shillings. . . (*Sitting on settee R.*) By the way, I have a daughter, haven't I? How was Sandy this morning?

JANE. I didn't see her. Aunt Mary is rather anxious about her.

MR. KNOWLE (*preparing to read the paper*). Has she left us for ever?

JANE. There's nothing to be frightened about really.

MR. KNOWLE. I'm not frightened.

JANE. She had breakfast before any of us were up, and went out with some sandwiches afterwards, and she hasn't come back yet.

MR. KNOWLE. A very healthy way of spending the day. (*Mrs. KNOWLE comes in L. and MR. KNOWLE rises.*) Well, Mary, I hear that we have no daughter now.

MRS. KNOWLE. Ah, there you are, Henry. Thank Heaven that you are back safely. (*Comes to chair c.*)

MR. KNOWLE. My dear, I always meant to come back safely. Didn't you expect me?

MRS. KNOWLE. I had given up hope. (*MR. KNOWLE sits on settee again.*) Jane here will tell you what a terrible morning I have had; prostrate on the sofa, mourning for my loved ones. (*Sitting on chair c.*) My only child torn from me, my husband—dead.

MR. KNOWLE (*surprised*). Oh, I was dead?

MRS. KNOWLE. I pictured the car smashed to atoms, and you lying in the road, dead, with Peters by your side.

MR. KNOWLE. Ah! How was Peters?

MRS. KNOWLE (*with a shrug*). I didn't look. What is a chauffeur to one who has lost her husband and her only child in the same morning?

MR. KNOWLE. Still, I think you might have looked.

JANE. Sandy's all right, Aunt Mary. You know she often goes out alone all day like this.

MRS. KNOWLE. Ah, *is* she alone? Jane, did you count the gardeners as I asked you?

MR. KNOWLE. Count the gardeners?

MRS. KNOWLE. To make sure that none of them is missing too.

JANE. It's quite all right, Aunt Mary. Sandy will be back by tea-time.

MRS. KNOWLE (*resigned*). It all comes of christening her Melisande. You know, Henry, I quite thought you said Millicent.

MR. KNOWLE (*putting aside paper*). Well, talking about tea, my dear—at which happy meal our long-lost daughter will be restored to us—we have a visitor coming, a nice young fellow who takes an interest in prints.

MRS. KNOWLE. I've heard nothing of this, Henry.

MR. KNOWLE. No, my dear, that's why I'm telling you now.

MRS. KNOWLE. A young man?

MR. KNOWLE. Yes.

MRS. KNOWLE. Nice looking?

MR. KNOWLE. Yes.

MRS. KNOWLE. Rich?

MR. KNOWLE. I forgot to ask him, Mary. However, we can remedy that omission as soon as he arrives.

MRS. KNOWLE. It's a very unfortunate day for him to have chosen. Here's Sandy lost, and I'm not fit to be seen, and—Jane, your hair wants tidying—

MR. KNOWLE. He is not coming to see you or Sandy or Jane, my dear; he is coming to see me. Fortunately, I am looking very beautiful this afternoon.

MRS. KNOWLE. Jane, you had better be in the garden, dear, and see if you can stop Sandy before she comes in, and just give

her a warning. (JANE crosses in front of MRS. KNOWLE and goes to mirror. She tidies her hair.) I don't know what she'll look like after roaming the fields all day, and falling into pools—

MR. KNOWLE. A sweet disorder in the dress kindles in clothes a wantonness.

MRS. KNOWLE. I will go and tidy myself. (She rises and moves down a pace or two.) Jane, I think your mother would like you to—but, after all, one must think of one's own child first. (She puts cushions straight on settee L.) You will tell Sandy, won't you? We had better have tea in here. . . . Henry, your trousers—(she looks to see that JANE is not listening, and then moves slowly to him and says in a loud whisper) your trousers—

MR. KNOWLE. I'm afraid I didn't make myself clear, Mary. It's a young fellow who is coming to see my prints; not the Prince of Wales who is coming to see my trousers.

MRS. KNOWLE (turning to JANE). You'll remember, Jane? (Going to door L.)

JANE (smiling). Yes, Aunt Mary.

MRS. KNOWLE. That's a good girl.

(She goes out L.)

MR. KNOWLE. Ah! . . . Your aunt wasn't very lucid, Jane. (JANE comes to L.C.) Which one of you is it who is going to marry the gentleman?

JANE. Don't be so absurd, Uncle Henry. (Sits settee L.)

MR. KNOWLE (still sitting on settee R. and taking out his catalogue again). Perhaps he would be interested in Lot 29. (BOBBY comes in through the windows and moves down C.) Ah, here's Bobby. Bobby, they tell me that you think of setting up house.

BOBBY (looking quickly at JANE). Who told you that?

MR. KNOWLE (reading from the catalogue). Now, starting with two hip-baths and a stuffed crocodile for nine shillings and sixpence, and working up to twelve aspidistras, a towel-horse and "The Maiden's Prayer" for eight shillings, you practically have the spare room furnished for seventeen and six. But perhaps I had better leave the catalogue with you. (He rises and presses it into the bewildered BOBBY's hands.) I must go and tidy myself up. Somebody is coming to propose to me this afternoon.

(He hurries out L.)

(BOBBY looks after him blankly, and then turns to JANE.)

BOBBY. I say, what's happened?

JANE. Happened?

BOBBY (moving towards JANE L.). Yes, why did he say that about my setting up house?

JANE. I think he was just being funny. He is sometimes, you know,

BOBBY. You don't think he guessed—

JANE. Guessed what? About you and Melisande?

BOBBY (*sitting on JANE'S right side on the settee L.*). I say, shut up, Jane. I thought we agreed not to say anything more about that.

JANE. But what else could he have guessed?

BOBBY (*leaning towards her*). You know well enough.

JANE (*shaking her head*). No, I don't.

BOBBY. I told you this morning.

JANE. What did you tell me?

BOBBY. You know.

JANE. No, I don't.

BOBBY. Yes, you do.

JANE. No, I don't.

BOBBY (*coming closer*). All right, shall I tell you again?

JANE (*edging away*). I don't want to hear it.

BOBBY (*moving still nearer to her*). How do you know you don't want to hear it, if you don't know what it is?

JANE. I can guess what it is.

BOBBY. There you are!

JANE. It's what you say to everybody, isn't it?

BOBBY (*loftily*). If you want to know, Miss Bagot, I have only said it to one other person in my life, and that was in mistake for you.

JANE (*coldly*). Melisande and I are not very much alike, Mr. Coote.

BOBBY. No. You're much prettier.

JANE (*turning her head away*). You don't really think so. Anyhow, it isn't true.

BOBBY. It is true, Jane. I swear it.

JANE. Well, you didn't think so yesterday.

BOBBY. Why do you keep talking about yesterday? I'm talking about to-day.

JANE. A girl has her pride, Bobby.

BOBBY. So has a man. I'm awfully proud of being in love with you.

JANE. That isn't what I mean.

BOBBY. What do you mean?

JANE (*awkwardly*). Well—well—well, what it comes to is that you get refused by Sandy, and then you immediately come to me and expect me to jump at you.

BOBBY. Suppose I had waited a year and then come to you, would that have been better?

JANE. Of course it would.

BOBBY. Well, really I can't follow you, darling.

JANE (*indignantly*). You mustn't call me darling.

BOBBY. Mustn't call you what?

JANE (*awkwardly*). Darling.

BOBBY. Did I call you darling ?

JANE (*shortly*). Yes.

BOBBY (*to himself*). "Darling." No, I suppose I mustn't. But it suits you so awfully well—darling. (*She stamps her foot.*) I'm sorry, darl—I mean Jane, but really I can't follow you. Because you're so frightfully fascinating, that after twenty-four hours of it, I simply have to tell you how much I love you, then your pride is hurt. But if you had been so frightfully unattractive that it took me a whole year to see anything in you at all, then apparently you'd have been awfully proud.

JANE. You *have* known me a whole year, Bobby.

BOBBY. Not really, you know. Directly I saw you and Sandy together I knew I was in love with one of you, but—well, love is a dashed rummy thing, and I thought it was Sandy. And so I didn't really see you till last night, when you were so awfully decent to me.

JANE (*wistfully*). It sounds very well, but the trouble is that it will sound just as well to the next girl.

BOBBY. What next girl ?

JANE. The one you propose to to-morrow.

BOBBY. You know, Jane, when you talk like that I feel that you don't deserve to be proposed to at all.

JANE (*loftily*). I'm sure I don't want to be.

BOBBY (*coming closer*). Are you ?

JANE. Am I what ?

BOBBY. Quite sure.

JANE. I should have thought it was pretty obvious seeing that I've just refused you.

BOBBY. Have you ?

JANE. Have I what ?

BOBBY. Refused me.

JANE. I thought I had.

BOBBY. And would you be glad if I went away and never saw you again ? (*She hesitates.*) Honest, Jane. Would you ?

JANE (*awkwardly*). Well, of course, I *like* you, Bobby. I always have.

BOBBY. But you feel that you would like me better if I were somebody else's husband ?

JANE (*indignantly*). Oh, I *never* said that.

BOBBY. Dash it, you've been saying it all this afternoon.

JANE (*weakly*). Bobby, don't ; I can't argue with you. But really, dear, I can't say now that I will marry you. Oh, you *must* understand. Oh, *think* what Sandy—

BOBBY. We won't tell Sandy.

JANE (*surprised*). But she's bound to know.

BOBBY. We won't tell anybody.

JANE (*eagerly*). Bobby !

BOBBY (*nodding*). Just you and me. Nobody else for a long time. A little private secret.

JANE. Bobby!

BOBBY (*coming to her*). Is it a bargain, Jane? Because if it's a bargain— (*Trying to embrace her.*)

JANE (*rising quickly and moving away to C.* BOBBY *risés too, holding her hand*). No, no, Bobby. Not now. I must go upstairs and tidy myself—no, I mustn't, I must wait for Melisande—no, Bobby, don't. Not yet. I mean it, really. Do go, dear, anybody might come in.

BOBBY. All right, darling, I'll go.

JANE. You mustn't say "darling." You might say it accidentally in front of them all.

BOBBY (*grinning*). All right, Miss Bagot . . . I am going now, Miss Bagot. (*At the windows up R.*) Good-bye, Miss Bagot. (JANE *blows him a kiss. He bows.*) Your favour to hand, Miss Bagot. (*He goes out through the window as if to exit R, sees MELISANDE coming through the garden, and turns.*) Hallo, here's Sandy! (*He hurries off in the opposite direction.*)

(MELISANDE *comes through the windows quickly, goes to JANE and embraces her.*)

MELISANDE. Oh, Jane, Jane!

JANE. What, dear?

MELISANDE. Everything.

JANE. Yes, but that's so vague, darling. Do you mean that—

MELISANDE (*dreamily*). I have seen him; I have talked to him; he has kissed me.

JANE (*amazed*). Kissed you? Do you mean that he has—kissed you?

MELISANDE. I have looked into his eyes, and he has looked into mine.

JANE. Yes, but who?

MELISANDE. The true knight, the prince, for whom I have been waiting so long.

JANE. But *who* is he?

MELISANDE (*going down R.*). They call him Gervase.

JANE. Gervase *who*?

MELISANDE (*turns scornfully*). Did Elaine say, "Lancelot *who*" when they told her his name was Lancelot? (*Sits settee R.*)

JANE. Yes, dear, but this is the twentieth century. He must have a name. (*She sits on the floor in front of MELISANDE.*)

MELISANDE (*dreamily*). Through the forest he came to me, dressed in blue and gold.

JANE (*sharply*). Sandy! (*Struck with an idea.*) Have you been out all day without your hat, darling?

MELISANDE (*vaguely*). Have I?

JANE. I mean—blue and gold. They don't do it nowadays.

MELISANDE (*nodding to her*). He did, Jane.

JANE. But how!—Why? Who can he be?

MELISANDE. He said he was a humble woodcutter's son. That means he was a prince in disguise. He called me his princess.

JANE. Darling, how could he be a prince ?

MELISANDE. I have read stories sometimes of men who went to sleep and woke up thousands of years afterwards and found themselves in a different world. Perhaps, Jane, *he* lived in those old days, and—

JANE. Did he *talk* like an ordinary person ?

MELISANDE. Oh no, no !

JANE. Well, it's really extraordinary. . . . Was he a gentleman ?

MELISANDE (*smiling at her*). I didn't ask him, Jane.

JANE (*crossly*). You know what I mean.

MELISANDE. He is coming this afternoon to take me away.

JANE (*amazed*). To take you away ? But what about Aunt Mary ?

MELISANDE (*vaguely*). Aunt Mary ! What has *she* got to do with it ?

JANE (*impatiently*). Oh, but— (*With a shrug of resignation.*) I don't understand. Do you mean he's coming *here* ? (MELISANDE *nods gravely.*) Melisande, you'll let me see him ?

MELISANDE. Yes. I've thought it all out. I wanted you here, Jane. He will come in ; I will present you ; and then you must leave us alone. But I should like you to see him. Just to see how different, how utterly different he is from every other man. . . . But you will promise to go when you have seen him, won't you ?

JANE (*nodding*). I'll say, " I'm afraid I must leave you now, and —" Sandy, how *can* he be a prince ?

MELISANDE. When you see him, Jane, you will say, " How can he not be a prince ? "

JANE. But one has to leave princes backward. (*Rises.*) I mean—he won't expect—you know—

MELISANDE. I don't think so. Besides, after all, you are my cousin.

JANE. Yes. I think I shall get that in ; just to be on the safe side. " Well, cousin, I must leave you now, as I have to attend my aunt." And then a sort of—not exactly a curtsy, but— (*She practises, murmuring the words to herself.*) I suppose you didn't happen to mention *me* to him this morning ?

MELISANDE (*half smiling*). Oh no !

JANE (*sitting on the left side of MELISANDE, hurt*). I don't see why you shouldn't have. What did you talk about ?

MELISANDE. I don't know. (*She grips JANE'S arm suddenly.*) Jane, I didn't dream it all this morning, did I ? It did happen ! I saw him—he kissed me—he is coming for me—he—

(*Enter ALICE, L.*)

ALICE. Mr. Gervase Mallory.

MELISANDE (*happily*). Ah! (*She rises and moves to above JANE, looking at the door.*)

(GERVASE comes in, an apparently ordinary young man in a loud golfing suit. JANE rises.)

GERVASE. How-do-you-do?

MELISANDE (*looking at him with growing amazement and horror*). Oh!

(JANE looks from one to the other in bewilderment.)

GERVASE (L.C.). I ought to explain. Mr. Knowle was kind enough to lend me some petrol last night; my car broke down; he was good enough to say I might come this afternoon and see his prints. I am hoping to be allowed to thank him again for his kindness last night. And—er—I've brought back the petrol.

MELISANDE (*still with her eyes on him*). My father will no doubt be here directly. This is my cousin, Miss Bagot.

GERVASE (*bowing*). How-do-you-do?

JANE (*nervously*). How-do-you-do? (*After a pause.*) Well, I'm afraid I must leave you now, as—

MELISANDE (*with her eyes still on GERVASE, putting out a hand and clutching at JANE*). No!

JANE (*startled*). What?

MELISANDE. Don't go, Jane. Do sit down, won't you, Mr.—

GERVASE. Mallory.

MELISANDE. Mr. Mallory.

GERVASE. Thank you.

MELISANDE. Where will you sit, Mr. Mallory? (*She is still talking in an utterly expressionless voice.*)

GERVASE. Thank you. Where are you— (*He indicates the sofa.*)

MELISANDE (*still holding JANE*). Thank you.

(MELISANDE and JANE sit down together on the sofa R. GERVASE sits on the settee L. There is an awkward silence.)

JANE (*half getting up*). Well, I'm afraid I must—

(MELISANDE pulls her down. She subsides. Pause.)

MELISANDE. Charming weather we are having, are we not, Mr. Mallory?

GERVASE (*enthusiastically*). Oh, rather. Absolutely top-hole.

MELISANDE (*to JANE*). Absolutely top-hole weather, is it not, Jane?

JANE. Oh, I love it.

MELISANDE. You play golf, I expect, Mr. Mallory

GERVASE. Oh, rather. I've been playing this morning. (*With a smile.*) Pretty rotten, too, I'm afraid.

MELISANDE. Jane plays golf. (*To JANE.*) You're pretty rotten, too, aren't you, Jane?

JANE. Bobby and I were both very bad to-day.

MELISANDE. I think you will like Bobby, Mr. Mallory. He is staying with us just now. I expect you will have a good deal in common. He is on the Stock Exchange.

GERVASE (*smiling*). So am I.

MELISANDE (*valiantly repressing a shudder*). Jane, Mr. Mallory is on the Stock Exchange. Isn't that curious? I felt sure that he must be directly I saw him.

(*There is another awkward silence.*)

JANE (*getting up*). Well, I'm afraid I must—

MELISANDE (*pulling her down*). Don't go, Jane. I suppose there are a great many of you on the Stock Exchange, Mr. Mallory?

GERVASE. Oh, quite a lot.

MELISANDE. Quite a lot, Jane. . . . You don't know Bobby—Mr. Coote?

GERVASE. N—no, I don't think so.

MELISANDE. I suppose there are so many of you, and you dress so much alike, and look so much alike, that it's difficult to be quite sure whom you do know.

GERVASE. Yes, of course, that makes it more difficult.

MELISANDE. Yes. You see that, don't you, Jane? . . . You play billiards and bridge, of course, Mr. Mallory?

GERVASE. Oh, yes.

MELISANDE. They are absolutely top-hole games, aren't they? Are you—pretty rotten at them?

(*Enter MR. KNOWLE, L.*)

GERVASE. Well—

MELISANDE (*getting up*). Ah, here's my father.

MR. KNOWLE (*coming down c.*). Ah, Mr. Mallory, delighted to see you. And Sandy and Jane to entertain you. That's right.

(*GERVASE has risen on MR. KNOWLE'S entrance. They shake hands.*)

GERVASE. How-do-you-do?

(*ALICE comes in with tea.*)

MR. KNOWLE. I've been wasting my day at a sale. I hope you spent yours more profitably. (*GERVASE laughs pleasantly.*) And what have you been doing, Sandy?

MELISANDE. Wasting mine, too, Father.

MR. KNOWLE. Dear, dear. Well, they say that the wasted hours are the best.

MELISANDE (*moving to the window, R.C.*). I think I will go and—
(MRS. KNOWLE comes in L. with outstretched hands. She comes down C.)

MR. KNOWLE (*stepping back*). My dear, this is Mr. Mallory.

MRS. KNOWLE. My dear Mr. Mallory! (*Turning round.*) Sandy, dear! How-do-you-do?

GERVASE (*shaking hands*). How-do-you-do?

MRS. KNOWLE. Sandy, dear! (MELISANDE comes slowly down.)
(To GERVASE.) My daughter, Melisande, Mr. Mallory. My only child.

GERVASE. Oh—er—we—

MELISANDE. Mr. Mallory and I have met, Mother.

MRS. KNOWLE (*indicating JANE*). And our dear Jane. My dear sister's only daughter. But dear Jane has a brother. Dear Harold! In the Civil Service. (*Moves R.*) Sandy, dear, will you pour out tea?

MELISANDE (*resigned*). Yes, Mother. (*She goes to the tea-table, bringing down chair from up L.*)

MRS. KNOWLE (*going to the sofa L.*). I am such an invalid now, Mr. Mallory—

GERVASE (*helping her*). Oh, I'm so sorry. Can I—?

MRS. KNOWLE. Thank you. (*She and GERVASE sit on the sofa L.*)
Dr. Anderson insists on my resting as much as possible. So my dear Melisande looks after the house for me. Such a comfort. You are not married yourself, Mr. Mallory?

GERVASE. No. Oh, no.

MRS. KNOWLE (*smiling to herself*). Ah!

MELISANDE. Jane, Mother's tea. (JANE crosses from sofa R. to L. of table.)

GERVASE (*rising and going behind sofa to table*). Oh, I beg your pardon. Let me—

JANE. It's all right. (*She hands tea over sofa to MRS. KNOWLE.*)

(GERVASE takes up a cake-stand.)

MR. KNOWLE. Where's Bobby? Bobby is the real expert at this.

MELISANDE. I expect Mr. Mallory is an expert, too, Father. You enjoy tea-parties, I expect, Mr. Mallory?

GERVASE (*bringing the cake-stand to MRS. KNOWLE*). I enjoy most things, Miss Knowle. (To MRS. KNOWLE.) Will you have one of these, Mrs. Knowle?

MRS. KNOWLE. Thank you. I have to be careful. Dr. Anderson insists on my being careful, Mr. Mallory. (*Confidentially.*) Nothing organic, you understand. (GERVASE takes the stand back and then returns and sits on sofa L., below MRS. KNOWLE.) Both my husband and I—Melisande has an absolutely sound constitution.

MELISANDE (*indicating cup*). Jane. . . (JANE takes cup and goes back to sofa R.) Sugar and milk, Mr. Mallory?

GERVASE (*rising and going to table*). Please. (*To MR. KNOWLE*.) Won't you have this, sir?

MR. KNOWLE (*moves to table*). No, thank you. (*GERVASE goes back to his former place*.) I have a special cup. (*He takes a large cup from MELISANDE*.) A family tradition, Mr. Mallory. But whether it is that I am supposed to require more nourishment than the others (*takes cake*), or that I can't be trusted with anything breakable, History does not relate. (*Moves over to sofa R.*)

GERVASE (*laughing*). Well, I think you're lucky. I like a big cup.

MR. KNOWLE (*turning*). Have mine.

GERVASE. No, thanks.

BOBBY (*coming in through the windows R.C.*). Hallo! Tea? (*Goes to behind R. sofa*.)

MR. KNOWLE. Ah, Bobby, you're just in time. (*To GERVASE*.) This is Mr. Coote. Bobby, this is Mr. Mallory.

(*They nod to each other and say, "How-do-you-do?"*)

MELISANDE (*indicating a seat next to her*). Come and sit here, Bobby.

BOBBY (*who was making for JANE*). Oh—er—righto. (*He moves to and sits in chair C.*)

MR. KNOWLE (*to GERVASE*). And how did the dance go last night?

JANE. Oh, were you at a dance? How lovely!

MELISANDE. Dance?

MR. KNOWLE. And a fancy dress dance, too, Sandy. You ought to have been there.

(*GERVASE looks at MELISANDE.*)

MELISANDE (*understanding*). Ah!

MRS. KNOWLE. My daughter is devoted to dancing, Mr. Mallory. Dances so beautifully, they all say.

BOBBY. Where was it?

GERVASE. Collingham.

(*MRS. KNOWLE gives back her cup.*)

MR. KNOWLE. And did they all fall in love with you? You ought to have seen him, Sandy.

GERVASE. Well, I'm afraid I never got there.

MR. KNOWLE. Dear, dear. . . . Peters is in love just now. . . . I hope he didn't give you cider in mistake for petrol.

GERVASE. No, it wasn't that. I lost my way.

MRS. KNOWLE (*pleased*). You have a car, Mr. Mallory?

GERVASE. Yes. Nothing very much, you know.

MRS. KNOWLE. Ah! (*To MELISANDE*.) Won't Mr. Mallory have some more tea, Sandy? (*MRS. KNOWLE takes cup from GERVASE.*)

MELISANDE. Will you have some more tea, Mr. Mallory?

GERVASE. Thank you. (*To MRS. KNOWLE.*) Won't you—

(*He begins to get up.*)

MRS. KNOWLE. Please don't trouble. I never have more than one cup. Dr. Anderson is very firm about that. Only one cup, Mrs. Knowle.

BOBBY (*rising and taking a plate from the stand. To MELISANDE.*) Sandwich? Oh, you're busy. Sandwich, Jane?

JANE (*taking one*). Thank you.

BOBBY (*to GERVASE*). Sandwich?

GERVASE. Thank you.

(*MELISANDE hands GERVASE'S cup to MRS. KNOWLE.*)

BOBBY (*to MR. KNOWLE*). Sandwich?

MR. KNOWLE. Thank you, Bobby. Fortunately nobody minds what I eat or drink.

BOBBY (*to himself*). Sandwich, Mr. Coote? Thank you. (*He takes one and sits c. again.*)

MRS. KNOWLE (*to GERVASE*). Being such an invalid, Mr. Mallory, it is a great comfort to me to have Melisande to look after the house.

GERVASE. I am sure it is.

MRS. KNOWLE. Of course, I can't expect to keep her for ever.

MELISANDE (*coldly*). More tea, Jane?

JANE. Thank you, dear. (*Crosses to behind MELISANDE at table.*)

MRS. KNOWLE. It's extraordinary how she has taken to it. I must say that I do like a girl to be a good housekeeper. Don't you agree, Mr. Mallory?

GERVASE. Well, of course, all that sort of thing is rather important.

MRS. KNOWLE. That's what I always tell Sandy. "Happiness begins in the kitchen, Sandy."

MELISANDE. I'm sure Mr. Mallory agrees with you, Mother.

GERVASE (*laughing*). Well, one must eat. (*JANE goes back to her former place.*)

BOBBY (*rising and passing plate*). Have another sandwich?

GERVASE (*taking one*). Thanks.

(*BOBBY sits again.*)

MRS. KNOWLE. Do you live in the neighbourhood, Mr. Mallory?

GERVASE. About twenty miles away. Little Malling.

JANE (*helpfully*). Oh, yes.

MRS. KNOWLE. Well, I hope we shall see you here again.

GERVASE. That's very kind of you indeed. I shall love to come.

MELISANDE. More tea. Father?

MR. KNOWLE. No, thank you, my love.

MELISANDE. More tea, Mr. Mallory?

GERVASE. No, thank you.

MR. KNOWLE (*getting up*). I don't want to hurry you, Mr. Mallory, but if you have really finished— (*He moves up to the window R.C. and puts his cup on the cabinet up C.*)

GERVASE (*getting up*). Right. (*MRS. KNOWLE takes his cup and passes it to BOBBY.*)

MRS. KNOWLE. You won't go without seeing the garden, Mr. Mallory? (*As GERVASE moves up C.*) Sandy, when your father has finished with Mr. Mallory, you must show him the garden. We are very proud of our roses, Mr. Mallory. Melisande takes a great interest in the roses.

GERVASE. I should like very much to see the garden. Shall I see you again, Mrs. Knowle. . . . Don't get up, *please*.

MRS. KNOWLE (*getting up*). In case we don't— (*She holds out her hand.*)

GERVASE (*C., shaking it*). Good-bye. And thank you so much.

MRS. KNOWLE (*L.C.*). Not good-bye. *Au revoir*.

GERVASE (*smiling*). Thank you. (*With a bow to JANE and BOBBY.*) Good-bye, in case—

BOBBY. Cheero.

JANE. Good-bye, Mr. Mallory.

MR. KNOWLE. Well, come along. (*As they go out.*) It is curious how much time one has to spend in saying "How-do-you-do" and "Good-bye." I once calculated that a man of seventy . . .

(*MR. KNOWLE and GERVASE go out through door L.*)

MRS. KNOWLE (*going to door R., above settee R.*). Jane, dear, would you mind coming with me to the drawing-room, and helping me to—(*looking at MELISANDE*) or—

JANE (*resigned*). Of course, Aunt Mary.

(*They go towards the door.*)

BOBBY (*rises—his mouth full*). May I come too, Mrs. Knowle?

MELISANDE. You haven't finished your tea, Bobby.

BOBBY. I shan't be a moment. (*He picks up his cup.*)

MRS. KNOWLE. Please come, dear Mr. Coote, when you have finished.

(*MRS. KNOWLE goes out R.*)

(*JANE turns at the door, sees that MELISANDE is not looking, and blows a hasty kiss to BOBBY.*)

MELISANDE. More tea, Bobby?

BOBBY. No, thanks.

MELISANDE. Something more to eat?

BOBBY. No, thanks. (*He gets up and walks towards the door.*)

MELISANDE. Bobby! (*Rises and comes C.*)

BOBBY (*turning*). Yes! (*At door R.*)

MELISANDE. There's something I want to say to you. Don't go.

BOBBY. Oh! Righto. (*He comes slowly back to c.*)

MELISANDE (*with difficulty, after a pause*). I made a mistake yesterday.

BOBBY (*not understanding*). A mistake? Yesterday?

MELISANDE. Yes. . . . You were quite right.

BOBBY. How do you mean? When?

MELISANDE. When you said that girls didn't know their own minds.

BOBBY. Oh! (*With an awkward laugh*.) Yes. Well—er—I don't expect any of us do, really, you know. I mean—er—that is to say— (*Glancing towards door R.*)

MELISANDE. I'm sorry I said what I did say to you last night, Bobby. I oughtn't to have said all those things.

BOBBY. I say, that's all right. (*Backing towards door.*)

MELISANDE. I didn't mean them. And—and, Bobby—I *will* marry you if you like.

BOBBY (*staggered, now by the door*). Sandy!

MELISANDE. And it was silly of me to mind your calling me Sandy, and to say what I did about your clothes, and I *will* marry you, Bobby. And—and thank you for wanting it so much.

BOBBY (*coming back c.*). I say, Sandy. I say! I say—

MELISANDE (*offering her cheek*). You may kiss me if you like, Bobby.

BOBBY. I say! . . . Er—er—(*he kisses her gingerly*) thanks! . . . Er—I say—

MELISANDE. What is it, Bobby?

BOBBY. I say, you know—(*he tries again*) I don't want you to—to feel that—I mean, just because I asked you twice—I mean I don't want you to feel that—well, I mean you mustn't do it just for *my* sake, Sandy. I mean Melisande.

MELISANDE. You may call me Sandy.

BOBBY. Well, you see what I mean, Sandy.

MELISANDE. It isn't that, Bobby. It isn't that.

BOBBY. You know, I was thinking about it last night—afterwards, you know—and I began to see, I began to see that perhaps you were right. I mean about my not being romantic and—and all that. I mean, I'm rather an ordinary sort of chap, and—

MELISANDE (*sitting on sofa R.—sadly*). We are all rather ordinary sort of chaps.

BOBBY (*eagerly—sitting beside her*). No, no. No, that's where you're wrong, Sandy. I mean Melisande. You *aren't* ordinary. I don't say you'd be throwing yourself away on me, but—but I think you could find somebody more suitable. (*Earnestly*.) I'm sure you could. I mean somebody who would remember to call you Melisande, and who would read poetry with you and—and all that. I mean, there are lots of fellows—

MELISANDE (*turning to him*). I don't understand. Don't you want to marry me now?

BOBBY (*with dignity*). I don't want to be married out of pity.

MELISANDE (*coldly*). I have told you that it isn't out of pity.

BOBBY. Well, what is it out of? I mean, after what you said yesterday about my tie, it can't be love.

MELISANDE. Are you under the impression that I am proposing to you?

BOBBY (*taken aback*). W-what?

MELISANDE. Are you flattering yourself that you are refusing me?

BOBBY. I say, shut up, Sandy. You know it isn't that at all.

MELISANDE (*turning from him*). I think you had better join Jane. (*Carelessly.*) It is Jane, isn't it?

BOBBY. I say, look here— (*She doesn't.*) Of course, I know you think I'm an awful rotter. . . . Well . . . well—oh, c—

MELISANDE. Jane is waiting for you.

(*MRS. KNOWLE comes in R.*)

MRS. KNOWLE. Oh, Mr. Coote, Jane is waiting for you.

BOBBY. Oh—er—

MELISANDE. Jane is waiting for you.

BOBBY (*realizing that he is not quite at his best*). Er—oh—er, righto. (*He goes to the door R. and hesitates there.*) Er—(*Now if he can only think of something really good, he may yet carry it off.*) Er—(*something really witty*)—er—er, righto! (*He goes out—to join JANE, who is waiting for him.*)

MRS. KNOWLE (*moving to above sofa L. and speaking in a soft, gentle voice*). Where is your father, dear? In the library with Mr. Mallory? . . . I want to speak to him. Just on a little matter of business. . . . Dear child! (*She touches her shoulder over the sofa.*)

(*She goes to the library.*)

MELISANDE. Oh! How horrible!

(*She walks about, pulling at her handkerchief and telling herself that she won't cry. But she feels that she is going to, and she goes to the open windows B.C., and stands for a moment looking out, trying to recover herself.*)

(*GERVASE comes in through the door L.*)

GERVASE (*gently*). Princess! (*She hears; her hand closes and tightens; but she says nothing.*) Princess!

(*With an effort she controls herself, turns round and speaks coldly.*)

MELISANDE. Please don't call me by that ridiculous name.

GERVASE (C.). Melisande!

MELISANDE. Nor by that one.

GERVASE. Miss Knowle.

MELISANDE (*coming down a little*). Yes! What do you want, (*facing away from him*) Mr. Mallory?

GERVASE (*moving to her*). I want to marry you.

MELISANDE (*taken by surprise*). Oh! . . . (*Turns*). How dare you!

GERVASE. But I told you this morning.

MELISANDE (*turning away again*). I think you had better leave this morning out of it.

GERVASE. But if I leave this morning out of it, then I have only just met you.

MELISANDE. That is what I would prefer.

GERVASE. Oh! . . . Then if I have only just met you, perhaps I oughtn't to have said straight off that I want to marry you.

MELISANDE. It is unusual.

GERVASE. Yes. But not unusual to *want* to marry you.

MELISANDE (*at the top of the settee R.*). I am not interested in your wants.

GERVASE. Oh! (*Gently*). I'm sorry that we've got to forget about this morning. (*Going closer to her*). Is it so easy to forget, Melisande?

MELISANDE. Very easy for you, I should think.

GERVASE. But not for you?

MELISANDE (*bitterly and turning quickly*). You dress up and amuse yourself, and then laugh and go back to your ordinary life again—you don't want to remember *that*, do you, every time you do it?

GERVASE. You let your hair down and flirt with me and laugh and go home again, but *you* can't forget. Why should I?

MELISANDE (*furiously*). How dare you say I flirted with you?

GERVASE. How dare you say I laughed at you?

MELISANDE. Do you think I knew you would be there when I went up to the wood?

GERVASE. Do you think *I* knew you would be there when *I* went up?

MELISANDE. Then why were you there all dressed up like that?

GERVASE. My car broke down and I spent the night in it. I went up the hill to look for breakfast.

MELISANDE (*bitterly*). Breakfast! That's all you think about.

GERVASE (*cheerfully*). Well, it's always cropping up.

MELISANDE (*in disgust*). Oh! (*She moves away from him R. and then turns round holding out her hand*). Good-bye, Mr. Mallory.

GERVASE (*taking it*). Good-bye, Miss Knowle. (*She turns—then he says gently*). May I kiss your hands, Melisande?

MELISANDE (*pathetically*). Oh, don't! (*She hides her face in them*.)

GERVASE. Dear hands. . . . May I kiss your lips, Melisande ?
(*She says nothing. He comes closer to her.*) Melisande !

(*He is about to put his arms round her, but she breaks away from him.*)

MELISANDE. Oh, don't, don't ! (*Crossing quickly L.*) What's the good of pretending ? It was only pretence this morning—what's the good of going on with it ? I thought you were so different from other men, but you're just the same, just the same. You talk about the things they talk about, you wear the clothes they wear. You were my true knight, my fairy Prince, this morning, and this afternoon you come down dressed like that (*she waves her hand at it*) and tell me that you are on the Stock Exchange ! Oh, can't you see what you've done ? All the beautiful world that I had built up for you and me—shattered, shattered. (*She sits down on the lower end of the sofa L.*)

GERVASE (*going to her*). Melisande !

MELISANDE. No, no !

GERVASE (*stopping*). All right.

MELISANDE (*recovering herself*). Please go.

GERVASE (*with a smile*). Well, that's not quite fair, you know.

MELISANDE. What do you mean ?

GERVASE. Well, what about *my* beautiful world—the world that I had built up ?

MELISANDE. I don't understand.

GERVASE. What about *your* pretence this morning ? I thought you were so different from other women, but you're just the same, just the same. You were my true lady, my fairy Princess, this morning ; and this afternoon the Queen, your mother, disabled herself by indigestion, tells me that you do all the housekeeping for her just like any ordinary commonplace girl. Your father, the King, has obviously never had a battle-axe in his hand in his life ; your suitor, Prince Robert of Coote, is much more at home with a niblick than with a lance ; and your cousin, the Lady Jane—

MELISANDE (*burying her head in a cushion*). Oh, cruel, cruel !

GERVASE (*remorsefully*). Oh, forgive me, Melisande. It was horrible of me. (*Sits by her.*)

MELISANDE. No, but it's true. How could any romance come into this house ? (*Turning to him.*) Now you know why I wanted you to take me away—away to the ends of the earth with you.

GERVASE. Well, that's what I want to do.

MELISANDE (*turning away*). Ah, don't ! When you're on the Stock Exchange !

GERVASE. But there's plenty of romance on the Stock Exchange. (*Nodding his head.*) Oh, yes, you want to look out for it.

MELISANDE (*reproachfully*). Now you're laughing at me again.

GERVASE. My dear, I'm not. Or if I am laughing at you, then I am laughing at myself too. And if we can laugh together, then we can be happy together, Melisande.

MELISANDE. I want romance, I want beauty. I don't want jokes.

GERVASE. I see what it is. (*Rises and goes c.*) You don't like my knickerbockers.

MELISANDE (*bewildered*). Did you expect me to ?

GERVASE (*c.*). No. (*After a pause.*) I think that's why I put 'em on. (*She looks at him in surprise.*) You see, we had to come back to the twentieth century some time ; we couldn't go on pretending for ever. Well, here we are—(*indicating his clothes*)—back. But I feel just as romantic, Melisande. I want beauty—your beauty—just as much. (*He goes to her and sits beside her.*)

MELISANDE. Which Melisande do you want ? The one who talked to you this morning in the wood, or the one who—(*bitterly*) does all the housekeeping for her mother ? (*Violently.*) And badly, badly, badly !

GERVASE. The one who does all the housekeeping for her mother—and badly, badly, badly, *bless* her, because she has never realized what a gloriously romantic thing housekeeping is.

MELISANDE (*amazed*). Romantic !

GERVASE (*with enthusiasm*). Most gloriously romantic. . . . Did you ever long when you were young to be wrecked on a desert island ?

MELISANDE. Oh, yes !

GERVASE. You imagined yourself there—alone or with a companion ?

MELISANDE. Often !

GERVASE. And what were you doing ? What is the romance of the desert island which draws us all ? Climbing the bread-fruit tree, following the turtle to see where it deposits its eggs, discovering the spring of water, building the hut—*housekeeping*, Melisande. . . . Or take Robinson Crusoe. When Man Friday came along and left his footprint in the sand, why did Robinson Crusoe stagger back in amazement ? Because he said to himself, like a good housekeeper, "By Jove, I'm on the track of a servant at last." There's romance for you !

MELISANDE (*smiling and shaking her head at him*). What nonsense you talk !

GERVASE. It isn't nonsense ; indeed, indeed it isn't. There's romance everywhere if you look for it. You look for it in the old fairy-stories, but did *they* find it there ? Did the gentleman who had just been given a new pair of seven-league boots think it romantic to be changed into a fish ? He probably thought it a confounded nuisance, and wondered what on earth to do with his boots. Did Cinderella and the Prince find the world romantic after they were married ? Think of the endless silent evenings which they spent together, with nothing in common but an admiration for Cinderella's feet—do you think *they* didn't long for the romantic days of old ? And in two thousand or two hundred thousand years, people will

read stories about us, and sigh and say, "Will those romantic days never come back again?" Ah, they are here now, Melisande, for us; for the people with imagination; for you and for me.

MELISANDE. Are they? Oh, if I could believe they were!

GERVASE. You thought of me as your lover and true knight this morning. Ah, but what an easy thing to be! You were my Princess. Look at yourself in the glass—how can you help being a princess? But if we could be companions, Melisande! That's difficult; that's worth trying.

MELISANDE (*gently*). What do you want me to do?

GERVASE. Get used to me. See me in a top-hat—see me in a bowler-hat. Help me with my work; play games with me—I'll teach you if you don't know how. I want to share the world with you for all our lives. That's a long time, you know; we can't do it on one twenty-minutes' practice before breakfast. We can be lovers so easily—can we be friends?

MELISANDE (*looking at him gravely*). You are very wise.

GERVASE. I talked with a wise man in the wood this morning; I've been thinking over what he said. (*Suddenly.*) But when you look at me like that, how I long to be a fool and say (*taking her in his left arm*) "Come away with me now, now, now," you wonderful, beautiful, maddening woman, you adorable child, you funny foolish little girl. (*Holding up a finger and touching her chin.*) Smile, Melisande. Smile! (*Slowly, reluctantly, she gives him a smile.*) I suppose the fairies taught you that. Keep it for me, will you—but give it to me often. Do you ever laugh, Melisande? We must laugh together sometimes—that makes life so easy.

MELISANDE (*with a happy little laugh*). Oh, what can I say to you?

GERVASE (*taking her hands*). Say, "I think I should like you for a companion, Gervase."

MELISANDE (*shyly*). I think I should like you for a companion, Gervase.

GERVASE. Say, "Please come and see me again, Gervase."

MELISANDE (*softly*). Please come and see me again, Gervase.

GERVASE (*jumping up, waving his hand and moving c.*). Say, "Hooray for things!"

MELISANDE (*standing up, but shyly still*). Hooray for things!

GERVASE. Thank you, Melisande . . . I must go. (*He goes to the windows R.C., then comes back, bends on one knee, raises her hand on his, and kisses it.*) My Princess!

(*Then GERVASE goes through the windows.*)

(*MELISANDE stays there, looking after him, her hand to her cheek. . . . But one cannot stand thus for ever. The new life must begin. With a little smile at herself, at GERVASE, at things, she fetches out the cookery book from a drawer in the cabinet up c. and comes down and sits in the chair c. , , ,*)

MELISANDE (*reading*). To make Bread-Sauce. . . . Take an onion, peel and quarter it, and simmer it in milk. . . .

(*But you know how the romantic passage goes. We leave her with it, curled up in the chair, this adorable child, this funny foolish little girl.*)

The CURTAIN comes down.

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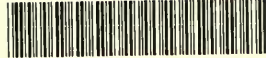
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