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THE SAVING GRACE

A Comedy in Three Acts

By

C. HADDON CHAMBERS

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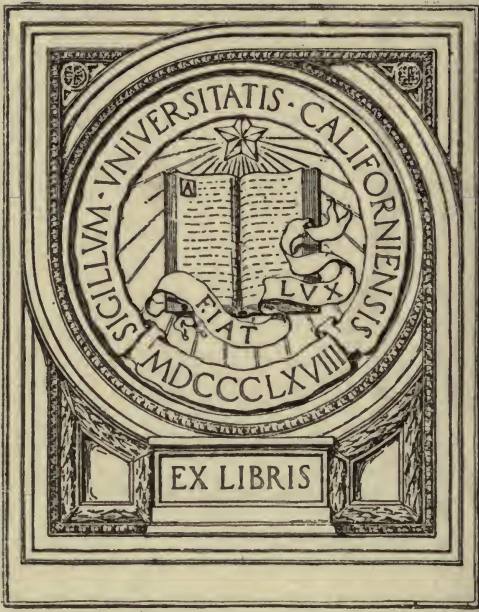


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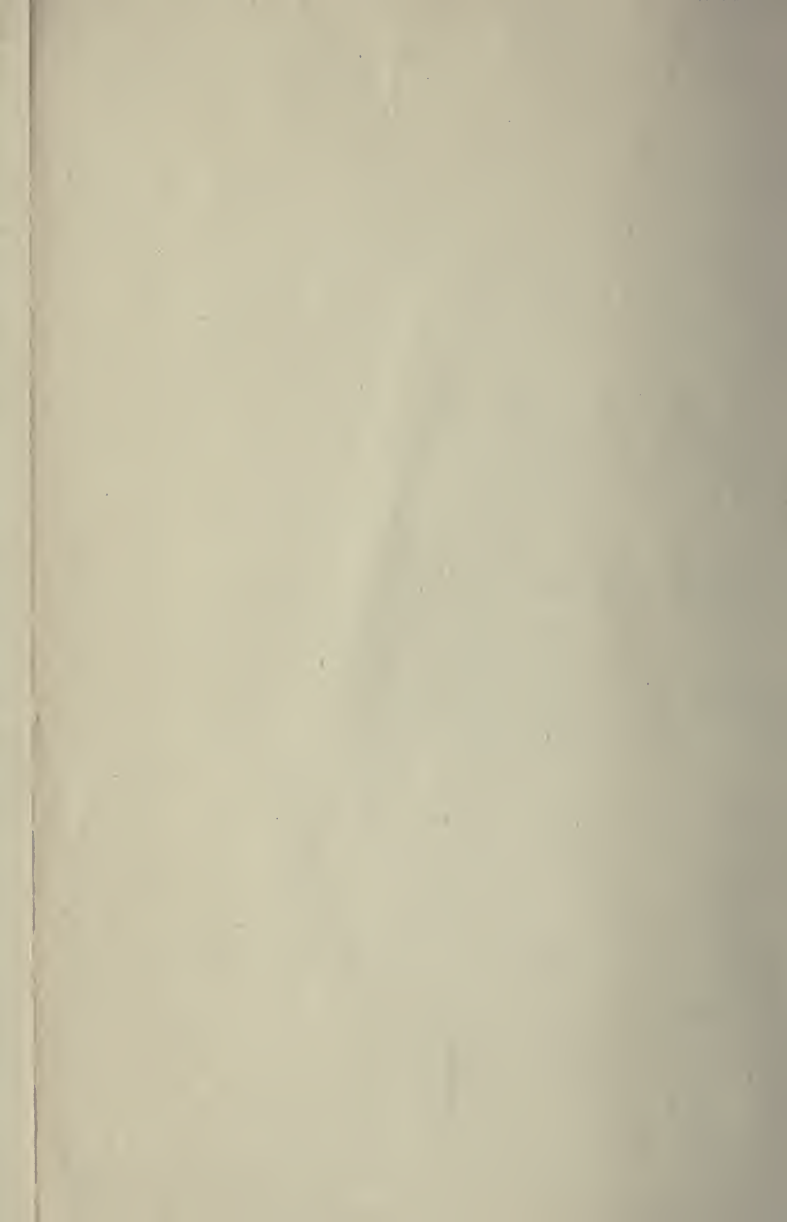


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1918

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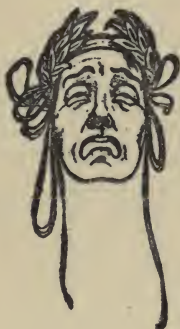


**THE
SAVING GRACE**



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THE SAVING GRACE. A
COMEDY IN THREE ACTS.
BY C. HADDON CHAMBERS



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

BRENTANO'S . NEW YORK
MCMXIX

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**DEDICATED
TO
PEPITA**

CHARACTERS AND CAST OF ORIGINAL PRO-
DUCTION OF THE COMEDY AT THE
GARRICK THEATRE, LONDON,
OCTOBER, 1917.

MR. BLINN CORBETT MR. CHARLES HAWTREY
MR. WILLIAM HOGG, *his manservant*. MR. A. E. GEORGE
MR. RIPLEY GUILDFORD MR. NOEL COWARD
MRS. CORBETT, *Blinn's wife*. . . MISS MARY HERROLD
SUSAN BLAINE, *Mrs. Corbett's niece*. MISS EMILY BROOKE
MRS. GUILDFORD, *Ripley's mother* . MISS ELLIS JEFFREY
ADA PARSONS, *Mrs. Corbett's maid*. MISS MAY BLAINNEY

TIME: *The Autumn of 1914.*

PLACE: *Minford, a village near London.*

CAST OF THE PRODUCTION AT THE EMPIRE
THEATRE, NEW YORK, UNDER CHARLES
FROHMAN, INC., SEPTEMBER 30, 1918.

MR. BLINN CORBETT MR. CYRIL MAUDE
MRS. CORBETT, *his wife* . MISS LAURA HOPE CREWS
SUSAN BLAINE, *Mrs. Corbett's niece*
MISS CATHLEEN NESBITT
MRS. GUILDFORD . . MISS CHARLOTTE GRANVILLE
MR. RIPLEY GUILDFORD, *her son* . MR. EDWARD DOUGLAS
PARSONS, *Mrs. Corbett's maid* . MISS ANNIE HUGHES
HOGG, *the Corbett's butler* . MR. WILLIAM DEVEREUX

PERIOD OF THE PLAY, *The Autumn of 1914.*

THE SAVING GRACE

ACT I

SCENE.—*At a small house in a village near London. A room which originally was a dining-room, but for present purposes is used not only as a dining-room, but as a general sitting-room. It is an oak-panelled room in the Jacobean style, and although it has seen better days, it is in perfectly good taste, and true to its period. On the left in the panelling, which need not be more than seven feet high, is a brown leather swing-door leading to the kitchen. At the back, between Center and Left, are double French windows leading to garden. Through these windows are seen a brick walk immediately outside, then trees, and a wall and the back cloth beyond suggests the open country.*

Center is a door leading to a hall. In the left of the hall is a staircase; in the right a wall with a door supposed to lead into a drawing-room.

Right, up stage, is a small recessed window opening to another part of the garden. Lower down is a large fireplace.

Left, right down, is a writing-table against the wall. Higher up, and just below the leather swing-door is a Welsh dresser. At back, between French windows and door center, is a small old cabinet, which is used as a wine and spirit stand. On right side of center door is an open bookcase full of books. Hanging on the panelling, left of fireplace, is a small mirror.

The additional furniture of the room consists of a small oak folding-table with a center and two leaves. This is a very important item in view of the business in Act II. It generally stands near the center with the

leaves down and a bowl of flowers placed upon it. There is a sofa L.C., the R. end of it a little higher up than the L. end. A large arm-chair is placed, facing the audience R. and near the fireplace. There is a chair at the writing-table, and there are in addition four light open-backed oak chairs, which are used in the dinner scene round the opened-out table. At other times, one stands on either side of the closed table, one against the wall below the fireplace R., and the remaining one against the wall at back between the door and the wine cupboard. There is a small occasional round table up R. between the arm-chair and the bookcase, and near the small window.

The carpet should be quiet in tone and patternless, and in harmony with the frieze above the panelling, and the *crétonne* which covers the sofa and arm-chair, and also forms the material for the curtains of both windows. There are short lace curtains on all the windows.

A copper coal-box stands below the fireplace.

There is a hearth-rug in tone with the decoration of the room.

When the curtain rises, it is late on an autumn afternoon. The stage is empty for a few moments, then enter Hogg up L. He is a pleasant-looking, medium-sized man of thirty-six. He is in his shirt-sleeves, and is wearing a butler's apron, and he is carrying a table-cloth and a plate-basket, which he places on table C.

Enter Parsons. She is a neat, smart, and rather determined-looking lady's maid of twenty-nine. She wears a plain black dress and lawn apron, but no cap. She helps Hogg to lay the cloth.

HOGG. There's a hole in this cloth.

PARSONS. You'll have to cover it up with something. There are holes in all of 'em.

HOGG. You'd think with three women in the 'ouse——

PARSONS (*during this speech, Hogg begins to lay the table*). Now, William, you know very well all the work falls on me. Lady's maid—that's what I am—that's my

true position in life; but what am I here? For the past seven months when the last crash came, I've been cook, kitchenmaid, house-parlor and chamber maid, and lady's maid all rolled into one—yes, and washwoman too, often enough. (*Parsons goes to Welsh dresser and brings down silver salver, with four tablespoons, two salts, two peppers, which she places on table.*)

HOGG. What's the good of grouching?

PARSONS. I'm not grouching! I'm stating facts.

HOGG. I do my bit, don't I?

PARSONS. You're all right. I never said you weren't. And Miss Susan's all right. She helps no end. As for Mrs. Corbett— (*Parsons puts silver salver back on Welsh dresser.*)

HOGG. Oh, come off—you know you like her.

PARSONS. I didn't say I didn't. (*Coming back R. of table.*)

HOGG. She's a good sort.

PARSONS (*without enthusiasm*). Oh, yes—so is Mr. Corbett. They're all good sorts. Who denies it? And what about us?

HOGG. Couple of mugs, I suppose.

PARSONS. Anyway we're good sorts, too, to have stuck to them so long. How much do you suppose there's on my book against them now?

HOGG. Small fortune.

PARSONS. Thirty-seven pounds twelve and ninepence.

HOGG. Real money!

PARSONS. What about you?

HOGG. One way and another what the Gov'nor owes me'd make a nasty hole in seventy quid. (*Hogg goes to fire and puts poker in its place.*)

PARSONS. Well, I'm fed up. I can't cope with it. Life's too short. It's not good enough. No money—no credit—I suppose you know the butcher has refused to serve us until his book is paid. (*Putting plate with bread on table.*)

HOGG. I've heard rumors. (*Coming down to table.*)

PARSONS. Called himself, this morning—a decent respectable man, but very firm.

HOGG. A chapelgoer. (*Putting napkins in their places.*)

PARSONS. And teetotaller, which is unusual in a butcher. I'd ordered a wing rib for dinner. He was sorry, was Mr. Bines, but it couldn't be done. If Mr. Corbett would let him have five pounds on account—Oh, you know.

HOGG. Well, what did you do?

PARSONS. I've ordered a duck from Simpkins, the poulterer. (*Puts piece of bread on each napkin.*)

HOGG. Has it come yet?

PARSONS. No, but it's sure to be all right. Simpkins drinks.

HOGG (*doubtful*). I don't know. Tradesmen are a lot of sheep. Now Bines is gone, look out for a panic.

PARSONS (*with a sudden outburst and speaking with great determination*). William, something's got to happen. This can't go on. You and I are going down-hill, and if we don't buck up we'll soon find ourselves at the bottom. Look at me! When I took this place three years ago, I was as smart a lady's maid as there was in England. I was in the right set, and went to all the best houses. I wouldn't have stayed with the Corbetts a fortnight after I found how things were, if it hadn't been for you.

HOGG. That's right; put the blame on me. Just like a woman!

PARSONS. Look at you. Why, when I met you down at the Duchess's when you were with Lord Blinkfield, you were looked upon as the coming man. Those were days! Dinner in the housekeeper's room, all of us in evening dress, with music and cards to follow. You used to play the mandolin too, like a dream. (*Crossing to below table.*)

HOGG (*sitting on the arm of sofa with the expression*

of one full of agreeable memories). Quite right. Quite right. I was somebody in those days.

PARSONS. And rather agreeable to look upon as well.

HOGG (*stroking his chin, and smoothing his hair with a touch of vanity*). So it was rumored.

PARSONS (*blushing*). Why—I—I was a little bit gone on you myself—even then. (*Crosses to Hogg. Slight pause.*)

HOGG (*sighing resignedly*). Ah, well!

PARSONS (*with sudden vehemence*). Yes—you were a promising young fellow, and if you'd played your cards well, you might have been butler in a swell family by now and owned a row of houses.

HOGG. I could do with a bit of bricks and mortar.

PARSONS. I should say so. There's some comfort to be got out of property. William, I'm going to get out. (*Crosses R. C.*)

HOGG. Now, Parsons—— (*Follows Parsons.*)

PARSONS. Oh, I know what you're going to say!—"Now, Parsons, be a sport." Well, I tell you I've been a sport long enough, and it's cost me thirty pounds, which I'll probably never see the color of. (*Contemptuously.*) "Be a sport" indeed! That means go against everything that's regular and respectable, take silly risks, gamble with your life. Not me, William! I'm just coming to my best years, and I mean to make the most of them.

HOGG. Your trouble, Parsons, is you have no faith.

PARSONS. I had thirty pounds' worth, and it's gone. (*Goes to fire and tidies up hearth.*)

HOGG. If you knew anything about business, you'd understand that it only requires one of the Gov'nor's schemes to come off for us to be rolling in money.

PARSONS. I may know nothing about business, but I have instincts, and my instincts tell me that Mr. Corbett knows no more about business than an unborn babe. Besides, he's not serious, he makes fun of everything. I believe he would make fun if he saw a person drowning. (*Leaving fire alone and facing him.*)

HOGG (*smiling*). It would depend upon who the person was.

PARSONS. Anyway he's not a financier. He's a soldier.

HOGG. Yes, he's a soldier, and a damn good one from all I heard when I first joined him. Well, there's a war on, and a pretty big one at that; and, mark my words, he'll get back into the Army and get a big job.

PARSONS. Get back! After his eloping with his Colonel's wife, and the divorce, and the bankruptcy, and owing money everywhere! Why, William, you must be crazy! And I used to think you intelligent!

HOGG. I say, Parsons, you're not a pessimist, are you? Not 'arf. (*Going to Welsh dresser for sherry glasses, taking up bread-plate with him.*)

PARSONS. There's no use calling me names. Mr. Corbett's a nice, well-spoken gentleman, but he's done. He's the King of the Has-beens, and you'll be Prime Minister if you don't watch out. (*Pause.*)

HOGG (*gravely*). You're fond of Miss Susan, aren't you? (*Coming towards table with sherry glasses.*)

PARSONS (*irritably*). You know very well I am. That's why I've stayed so long—that and—and you.

HOGG. Well, don't you want to help give her her chance?

PARSONS. Chance! Poor darling, she's never had one, and never will while she sticks to the Corbetts.

HOGG. Well, she's going to have it now. (*Putting glasses on table.*)

PARSONS. How? What do you mean?

HOGG. Don't you know who's coming for dinner to-night?

PARSONS. One of your Blinn's stony-broke pals, I suppose.

HOGG. Stony-broke! I wish I was as stony-broke as Ripley Guildford!

PARSONS (*very impressed*). Young Mr. Guildford—the one we met in Dinard last year?

HOGG. That's the party.

PARSONS (*incredulously*). He's never coming here!

HOGG. That's right—call me a liar.

PARSONS. But we never saw him after Dinard.

HOGG. The ladies met him in town the other day, and invited him down to dinner. You can guess why he accepted. (*Going to her.*)

PARSONS (*pleased and excited*). That's why they've been working at their frocks all day.

HOGG. And why they're so particular about the dinner.

PARSONS (*looking through French window*). And why Miss Susie's picking so many flowers for the table.

HOGG. That's why—a good-looking young fellow, and the only child of a rich mother.

PARSONS (*her face suddenly falling*). They'll never bring it off—not with their accord—— (*Coming down below settee.*)

HOGG (*with insistence, crossing to her*). Give 'em a chance, can't you. Let 'em have a run for their money. (*Coaxingly.*) Come now—(*slight pause*) be a——

PARSONS (*quickly*). Not a sport; that's all over.

HOGG (*his arm round her*). I was going to say darling. (*He is about to kiss her when a knock is heard off. Exit Parsons quickly up L. Hogg goes to dresser for glasses, which he places on table, whistling a tune. A few moments' pause.*)

Enter Parsons.

PARSONS. It's Simpkin's boy with the duck.

HOGG. Good.

PARSONS. And he won't leave it without the money.

HOGG (*irritably*). There, what did I tell you? Bines started it, and now the whole village has gone.

PARSONS (*holding out her hand*). Come on—fork out! (*Both below table.*)

HOGG (*very cross*). What do you mean, fork out? Fork what out?

PARSONS (*inexorably*). Five and threepence.

HOGG (*crosser still*). Five and threepence? Where would I get five and threepence? Why, it's a fortune!

One'd think I was a Rothschild. . . . Where's the duck now?

PARSONS. Where I put it, of course. In the oven.

HOGG (*smiling*). Well, that's all right. What's your trouble?

PARSONS. The boy's waiting for the money.

HOGG. Well, let him wait. He won't bite you. Make him comfortable. Give him that wooden chair with the broken hind leg.

PARSONS. Now, William, what's the use of shirking it. You know very well if the boy goes back without the money or the duck, Simpkins'll be round here in no time, probably in drink and ready to give the whole show away—then good-bye to Miss Susie's chances.

Enter Mr. Blinn Corbett, C. He is a good-looking man of forty-eight with a well-preserved figure. His clothes are old, but well kept and well fitted. He is in evening jacket suit and black tie. He is evidently careful of his appearance, and his hair, which is streaked with gray, is well brushed.

HOGG (*not seeing Blinn—still irritably*). I tell you I haven't the money, so there's an end of it. (*Hogg crosses to fire, Parsons takes a step L.*)

BLINN. End of what? (*Hogg and Parsons turn and face Blinn.*)

HOGG (*turning to him*). I beg pardon, sir. A little difficulty in the kitchen.

BLINN (*above table, C*). Tell me about it, Parsons.

PARSONS. I'm sorry, sir, but Simpkins, the poulterer, gave his boy orders not to leave the duck unless we paid ready money, five and threepence.

BLINN. Simpkins! Why I shook hands with Simpkins and asked after his wife before a lot of people only the day before yesterday.

HOGG. Tradespeople are very ungrateful, sir.

BLINN. Where's the duck now?

PARSONS. In the oven, sir.

BLINN (*cheerfully*). Well, that's all right.

PARSONS. Excuse me, sir, but Simpkins is a very objectionable person, and I—I thought there might be reasons for avoiding any unpleasantness to-night.

BLINN (*thoughtfully*). Humph! Quite right. (*Slight pause.*) Well, Hogg, you'd better pay, I suppose. (*Hogg looks cross.*)

PARSONS (*smiling to herself*). That's what I was telling him, sir.

HOGG. I'm very sorry, but I haven't the money, Mr. Corbett—really I haven't. The only cash I've got is one and ninepence.

BLINN. One and nine from five and three leaves three and six. (*Hogg's face falls heavily.*) How much have you, Parsons?

PARSONS (*firmly*). Nothing, sir.

BLINN. Oh, you must have counted!

Enter Mrs. Corbett (Georgina), R. She is a small and pretty woman in the late thirties. She is now dressed for the evening, but her bodice isn't yet buttoned up at the back, and she has thrown a red silk shawl over her shoulders.

MRS. CORBETT. Everything going all right?

BLINN. No. Simpkins won't leave the duck without the money.

MRS. CORBETT. But he must know he'll be paid—some time.

BLINN. Of course he must know he'll be paid—some time.

MRS. CORBETT. I always disliked that man. He drinks.

BLINN. Good old sport!

MRS. CORBETT. Well, I suppose Hogg had better pay him.

HOGG (*quickly*). Excuse me, ma'am——

BLINN. Hogg's only got one and ninepence.

MRS. CORBETT. Do me up please, Blinn. (*She goes to him above table and takes the shawl from her shoulders. Blinn buttons up her bodice at the back.*)

BLINN. Simpkins might take it on account.

MRS. CORBETT. Where's the duck now?

PARSONS. In the oven, ma'am.

MRS. CORBETT (*cheerfully*). Well, that's all right.

BLINN. Wrong again, my dear. Simpkins is a quarrelsome person with a peculiarly loud voice.

MRS. CORBETT. How horrid!

BLINN (*significantly*). And we have a guest.

MRS. CORBETT. Yes, I know. It's most provoking.

BLINN. I thought that perhaps you—— (*this insinuatingly as he still buttons her dress. She gives him a quick, indignant look over her shoulder. Slight pause.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Parsons, you will find a two-shilling piece in my manicure box.

PARSONS. Yes, ma'am! (*She is about to go when Blinn speaks.*)

BLINN. She'll be lucky if she does.

MRS. CORBETT (*quickly*). What do you mean, I left one there.

BLINN (*coolly*). I didn't.

MRS. CORBETT (*indignantly*). You——!

BLINN (*soothingly*). I had telegrams to send.

MRS. CORBETT. Oh! (*With resignation.*) Well, that's that!

BLINN. Meanwhile the bird will need basting. (*Exit Parsons, L. up.*) I hope she's stuffed the damned thing. There's no good standing there scratching your head, Hogg.

MRS. CORBETT. What do you propose?

HOGG. I was thinking, ma'am, that perhaps Miss Susan would have an idea.

MRS. CORBETT (*brightening up*). Ah! (*The buttoning is finished. She moves away R., from Blinn.*)

BLINN. Or money. (*To Mrs. Corbett*). I suspect Susie of savings. I followed her for two hours the other day, to make sure, but she was too fly for me.

MRS. CORBETT. Hogg—call Miss Susan.

HOGG. Yes, ma'am. (*Exit Hogg by French window.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Thank heaven, there is *one* brainy person in the house. (*Goes to fire and sits in arm-chair.*)

BLINN. Darling, you flatter me.

MRS. CORBETT. You—you dear old stupid! I meant Susie, of course. She'll find a way out.

BLINN. Or produce a little "ready."

Enter Susan by French Window L. She is a beautiful and fascinating girl of twenty-three, with a piquant manner and an irresistible smile. She is dressed for the evening and carries a quantity of flowers which she has gathered for table decoration.

SUSAN. What's the tragedy about Simpkins?

BLINN. He's gone back on us, darling. Demands cash for the duck.

SUSAN. Where's his silly old duck now?

MRS. CORBETT. In the oven, thank heaven,

Enter Hogg.

SUSAN (*beaming beautifully on all*). Well, that's all right, isn't it?

BLINN (*standing close to table*). On the contrary, my dear.

SUSAN. Why? I always thought Simpkins was a good sort.

BLINN (*gravely*). We've been misinformed, my love. From information more recently to hand it would appear that he's a contumacious and drunken swine, and a trouble-maker of the worst description.

SUSAN. I'm disappointed in Simpkins.

BLINN (*warmly*). I knew you would be, darling. The sum demanded is five shillings and threepence. Hogg is prepared to contribute one and nine—— (*Hogg groans internally, and puts flower bowl on table C. He then goes L.*)

SUSAN. Very generous of him considering there won't be much of the duck left when we've done with it. (*She goes up to mantelpiece with some flowers.*)

BLINN. For the rest, I grieve to tell you there's not a cent in the house—at least as far as we know. I said,

darling, as far as we know. (*Susan gives him a stony, sphinx-like look and crosses L. of table. Mrs. Corbett and Hogg are secretly very interested.*) Of course, a row before young Guildford would be fatal. Nice, clean young fellow. (*Susan arranges flowers in bowl on table C. Enter Parsons, L. up.*)

PARSONS (*aside to Hogg*). He's still there, the little beast.

HOGG. What's he doing?

PARSONS. Rubbing the back of his head—I gave him that chair.

BLINN (*sweetly to Susan*). Of course, darling, if I was wrong in thinking you had a few miserable shillings saved up—personally I hate money. (*Susan stops arranging flowers on table, gives Blinn one eloquent look and then appears to think hard.*) (*Half turning to his wife.*) It's wonderful to watch a great mind at work.

SUSAN (*suddenly*). Parsons!

PARSONS (*going to Susan below settee*). Yes, Miss Susie! (*Susan goes to her. Blinn rather eagerly follows. Susan turns to him and waves him back.*)

SUSAN (*smiling*). You stand away, Nunkie. This is a private matter.

BLINN (*disappointed, walking away*). I only thought I might help.

SUSAN (*lowering her voice*). At the back of the left-hand drawer of my wardrobe under some old petticoats, you'll find a black-and-white-striped stocking with twelve shillings in the toe. (*She sees Blinn still hovering near.*) Go away, Nunkie! (*He does. She lowers her voice.*) I saved it for gloves. Take enough to pay for that horrible little duck, and leave the rest. (*They have all secretly watched this.*)

PARSONS (*much relieved*). Yes, Miss Susie! (*Exits L. Hogg, looking very pleased, exits L. Mrs. Corbett and Blinn are looking anxiously at Susan.*)

SUSAN (*with a glance at them*). You needn't stare, children. The beastly little boy will be paid.

MRS. CORBETT. Well, thank heaven! that's settled. (*Crossing to settee and picking up evening paper.*)

BLINN. Genius! That's what I call it, genius! (*Mrs. Corbett takes up the evening paper and reads. Susan picks up another newspaper from writing table, and sits on L. arm of sofa.*) Well, so far so good. (*He sits in arm-chair by fire and goes on talking, not noticing that the others are industriously reading.*) Thanks to my foresight there will be a decent dinner to-night at least. What with a nice tin of sardines, Simpkin's duck, and some Californian peaches, we shall do ourselves fairly well. In regard to wine—I say in regard to wine, there I score again. (*He glances at the other two for appreciation, but finds they are absorbed in their reading. He raises his voice considerably and crossly.*) I said, "There I score again." (*The other two start and look up.*)

SUSAN (*kindly*). You always score, Nunkie dear.

(*Blinn turns his questioning, almost threatening gaze on Mrs. Corbett.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*firmly*). Always.

BLINN. Thank you. (*He withdraws his eyes from them. They return to their reading.*) As you say, there I score again. And now, of course, you're dying to know how. You shall. You must understand that Berry Brothers, the celebrated wine merchants of St. James's Street, enjoy the added distinction of having served my family for a couple of centuries. "Ah, but," you say, "they were among the principal creditors of your second bankruptcy, and for over two years they've refused to give you credit"; to which I reply, "Too true, but what about a well-thought-out and carefully executed flank movement? What about selling Berry's excellent wine on a 10 per cent. commission? And what about samples?" (*He leans back in triumph. Pause. He looks at the two ladies, who still read. He raises his voice, crossly.*) I said, "What about samples?" (*They start and look up.*)

SUSAN (*vaguely*). Samples. Oh, yes—one must have samples, mustn't one, Aunt Georgie? (*She returns to her paper.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*with false enthusiasm*). Samples? Rather! I'm all for samples. (*She turns the paper over and reads.*)

BLINN (*sourly*). You *would* be! Agent for Berry Brothers! It's enough to make my old dad sit up and laugh in his cozy little grave. Not that he was a laughing man, although he must have drunk rivers of Berry's port in his day. Dear old father! He was the only human being who ever understood me. He hated me so cordially that he invariably left a room directly I entered it. (*Pause. He looks at the others and raises his voice.*) I was saying that my dear old father——

MRS. CORBETT (*amiably*). Well, what about the old thing?

BLINN. Put down that paper.

MRS. CORBETT (*with pretended trepidation*). There! (*She puts it down.*) I was only looking at the racing news.

BLINN. Susan! (*Rising.*)

SUSAN (*innocently*). Yes, Uncle Blinn.

BLINN. Put down that paper. (*Crosses C.*)

SUSAN. Certainly, dear Uncle Blinn. (*Does so.*)

BLINN. I suppose you too were reading the racing news.

SUSAN. No, I was reading the fashion article.

BLINN. You're a couple of bally liars—both of you.

SUSAN (*innocently*). We can't both be a couple, Nun-
kie dear.

BLINN. Well, whatever it is, that's what you are.
. . . You were both reading the war news. (*He looks from one to the other.*) Come—own up.

SUSAN (*in a spirit of humor*). Guilty!

BLINN (*to his wife*). Georgie?

MRS. CORBETT (*playfully*). I decline to answer.

BLINN. Both guilty! You've been reading the news of this wretched war against my express wish.

SUSAN. What else is there to read?

BLINN. Why read at all? Why not sit at my feet, and coax me into talking to you?

SUSAN. I never thought of that.

BLINN (*to Georgie*). As for you——

MRS. CORBETT. Well?

BLINN. I'm not surprised—I'm only hurt—hurt somewhere here. (*Touches the neighborhood of his heart.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*touched*). Oh, Blinn! (*Rises.*)

BLINN. I'm not in the war, am I? They're doing without me, aren't they? And a nice mess they're making of it. And why am I not in it. Tell me that!

MRS. CORBETT (*sadly*). I know—I know. Because you ran away with your Colonel's wife.

BLINN. I wasn't thinking of that.

MRS. CORBETT (*sincerely and with growing emotion*). But it's true—it's true, it's all my fault, I oughtn't to have let you. I ought to have gone on putting up with the old brute. (*She rises.*) I ruined you, Blinn dear, but I don't regret it. Of course I'm sorry in one way—particularly because it spoiled your career—but we've been happy together, haven't we? (*She goes after him evidently with a view to an embrace—he evades her by going round arm-chair by fire. She follows him.*) We were meant for each other, and we know how to put up with each other, because we really love each other, don't we? (*She still pursues while he evades.*) And although we're always hard up nowadays, I'd rather live in poverty with you than in luxury with that old Turk— Blinn, will you stop.

BLINN. Why should I?

MRS. CORBETT. I want to kiss you.

SUSAN. Best let her kiss you, Nunkie. She always gets her own way in the end.

BLINN (*resignedly*). Oh, very well! (*Sits on R. arm of sofa. Mrs. Corbett throws her arms around him and kisses him.*) Save me, Susie!

SUSAN (*calmly*). That's enough, Aunt Georgie. Come and sit down.

MRS. CORBETT (*weakly and with resignation*). Very well, dear. (*She is genuinely moved and is dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief. She sits with Susan on sofa, who administers to her, woman-like. Meanwhile Blinn dusts his coat.*)

BLINN. What's the good of making a fuss and covering my coat with powder? As Georgie so tersely puts it, I ran away with the Colonel's wife and there's an end of it. (*Then with sudden aggression.*) And why did I run away with the Colonel's wife—tell me that?

SUSAN. Because you loved each other, of course.

BLINN. Nothing of the kind.

MRS. CORBETT. Oh, Blinn!

BLINN (*to Susan, emphatically*). I ran away with that overfond and foolish woman because she was unhappy with the dear old buck.

MRS. CORBETT. I should think I was—my life was a daily martyrdom. But you loved me with all your soul—you know you did—

BLINN. Silence, Georgie!

MRS. CORBETT (*to Susan, dropping her voice*). He adored me, my dear, worshipped the ground I walked on— (*Then she further drops her voice into whispered confidences, and she and Susie talk in dumb show, taking no notice of Blinn during the following.*)

BLINN (*crosses R. During speech he goes to sideboard at back and helps himself to a whisky and soda*). It was the sporting thing to do, and characteristically I did it. Whatever faults they may find in me—and I myself am conscious of more than one—they can never accuse me of not behaving like a sportsman. I'm not sure that the act of running away with another man's wife isn't the very highest proof of the sporting instinct. True, I owed more money than I could pay to the bookmakers, also to the money lenders. Many a man would have hung on, waiting for something to turn up, and borrowing from

Peter to pay Paul. I certainly tried my dear old father, who was still alive. Language? The dear old man! God bless him! He didn't employ words—he invented 'em. And he didn't speak 'em—he kept 'em in his mouth till they got red hot, and then hurled 'em at you like hand-grenades. (*He finishes his drink and puts tumbler on mantelpiece.*) Well, I did the sporting thing again. I went bankrupt. (*Pause. The ladies continue to whisper. He raises his voice wrathfully.*) I said, "I went bankrupt!"

MRS. CORBETT (*soothingly*). Nobody said you didn't, dear.

BLINN. Why don't you listen when I talk to you? You're fiddling while Rome's burning.

MRS. CORBETT. We're not fiddling—silly old thing!

SUSAN. I had to give up the violin years ago.

BLINN. Thank God!

MRS. CORBETT. Oh, Blinn! Susan used to play beautifully.

BLINN. I'm going to be frank with you two, and when I'm frank I'm terrible. We're broke—broke to the wide.

MRS. CORBETT. But that's an old story, dear. We've been broke for years.

BLINN. If I had been favored with your complete attention you'd have noticed that I added the idiom to the wide. (*Coming below table.*)

SUSAN (*to Mrs. Corbett*). Meaning the wide, wide world, Auntie dear.

BLINN. Thank you, Susan. (*Slowly and deliberately.*) To vary the formula, there has arisen in our precarious lives another in a long series of bitter crises. This time the lid is on. In a word, thumbs are down. Nobody can say I haven't been a trier—but like many another good man I've failed. In the years I've been going down to the City, I've never missed an appointment—no, not one. The hours and days I've put in at the Bodega in Queen Victoria Street—

SUSAN. But the splendid schemes you had, Nunkie

dear. That imitation rubber company, for instance. Haven't you a lot of founder's shares?

BLINN. Any quantity, but the company was wound up last week, and the promoter is on the high seas. The damned stuff wasn't any good.

SUSAN (*gloomily*). Oh!

MRS. CORBETT (*gloomily*). Oh! (*Pause. Recovering her spirits.*) Well, thank heaven, there are the Honduras railway bonds. You're sure to sell some of them.

BLINN. If I do I'll be locked up.

MRS. CORBETT. Why?

BLINN. Only because there isn't any railway.

MRS. CORBETT. What's become of it?

BLINN. It never was.

MRS. CORBETT (*indignantly*). Of all the outrageous—

SUSAN (*interrupting*). Well, surely those new patent dog biscuits you have an interest in are all right, Nunkie? They look good enough for human beings.

BLINN. They were tried on a dog three days ago!

SUSAN. Oh, good!

BLINN. No, bad! (*Slight pause.*) The dog died! (*Tragic pause.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*melting*). Poor little doggie.

BLINN (*with withering sarcasm*). Your feeling, my dear, does credit to your heart, but—

MRS. CORBETT (*interrupting innocently*). What was his name?

BLINN (*furiously*). How the— (*controls himself.*) How should I know? Probably "Fido." He was a suburban dog. (*Mrs Corbett can be noted saying to herself "Poor little Fido."*) Susan, I think I have your attention, and thank God you have sense. Have I made my meaning clear to you?

SUSAN. You mean about the thumbs? (*As the evening draws in the lights are slightly lowered.*)

BLINN. Yes! (*She turns her thumbs down with an inquiring look on her face.*) Exactly! (*Turning his*

thumbs down.) (*Mrs. Corbett wakes from her reverie about the dog and looks from one to the other.*)

SUSAN. But, Nunkie dear, perhaps after all they'll take you back in the Army now the war is on——

BLINN (*with simple dignity*). They've refused. (*He walks up C.*)

SUSAN. Oh, then that's an end of it. (*Susan and Mrs. Corbett look very cast down.*)

BLINN. As a last hope I thought of General Faber. I was with him in South Africa. I wired to him.

MRS. CORBETT. That's where my two shillings went.

BLINN (*dryly*). Part of it. Good old Faber, he's one of those strong, silent men who never speak except to be rude to somebody.

MRS. CORBETT. He was never rude to me. I think he liked me—but of course he was only a Brigadier in those days. (*Pause. A double knock is heard—and the tinkle of a distant house-bell. The three on the stage look at each other—anxious pause. Blinn gently hums an air and lightly brushes his coat with the back of his hand, with an assumption of indifference. The others both rise. There is suspense in the atmosphere.*)

Enter Hogg carrying a small salver. He goes to Blinn.

HOGG. Telegram for you, sir!

BLINN (*indifferently*). Oh, really—er—put it there, Hogg. (*Pointing to table C. Hogg does so, and after a doubtful look at Blinn exits.*) Where were we, Susan?

SUSAN. You were saying you had wired to General Faber.

BLINN. Oh, yes!

SUSAN. That is probably his reply. (*Crossing to back of table and pointing to telegram.*)

BLINN. I shouldn't wonder, by Jove! (*Susan and Mrs. Corbett exchange glances. The latter is getting worked up by Blinn's apparent indifference. Mrs. Corbett is L., Blinn is C., and Susan is R.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*with a sudden outburst*). There is

nothing so irritating in all the world as a person who gets a telegram and doesn't open it.

BLINN (*brightly*). Oh, are you really interested, Georgie? I thought you were still with Fido. (*Takes up telegram.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Oh, Blinn, aren't you ashamed?

BLINN (*with a sudden outburst of passionate sincerity, and throwing telegram on floor.*) Ashamed! Ashamed! What else can I be when I'm begging my way back, hat in hand—trying to crawl in by the area door of the War Office. (*Takes stage, going up C.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*impulsively*). Darling, do you think I don't know that you're breaking your heart to get back?

SUSAN (*with quick sympathy*). Nunkie! Nunkie!

BLINN (*quietly—having by a great effort controlled himself*). Well—what's the matter? (*He comes down.*)

SUSAN (*a little confused*). Only that lots of good men have made mistakes, and lots have got back. (*Susan comes to him R., and Mrs. Corbett comes to him L.*)

BLINN (*with great affected cheeriness*). Have they? Dear old sports!

MRS. CORBETT. I was only reading the other day about a man—

BLINN (*interrupting*). Were you, Georgie?

SUSAN. So you see, Nunkie darling— (*She takes his arm affectionately.*)

BLINN. I'm sorry. I must have got out of bed the wrong side this morning. No, I couldn't have though, for that side is against the wall—besides Georgie was there—weren't you, old girl? (*He pinches her cheek, much to her satisfaction.*) Now where the deuce is that beastly telegram? (*Susan picks it up from the floor.*)

SUSAN. Here it is. (*She hands it to him. He holds it in a position ready to open it, his eyes upon it. The two ladies watch him with great anxiety. He looks up and catches their eyes. He smiles nervously and says*

"Hollo." Then he quickly opens it and reads the telegram. His face is a study.)

MRS. CORBETT (*with tense anxiety*). Well?

BLINN (*quietly*). I have the General's profound sympathy. Dear old Gen.! (*Slight pause. He goes over to fireplace and throws telegram in fire.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*impulsively*). Blinn! (*She covers her face with her hands.*)

BLINN (*with an entire change of manner*). Well, that's enough about me. (*Glances at watch.*) By Jove! nearly eight! Turn on the light, Susie, if it hasn't been cut off. I had a threatening letter yesterday. (*Susan turns on the light, and draws the curtains over windows.*) Run and finish titivating yourself, Georgie. (*Takes her up stage.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*who is very downcast, with great sympathy*). Oh, Blinn!

BLINN (*to cheer her up*). That's all right, old girl. (*He pats and kisses her hand.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*at door C.*). That beastly old Faber used to dine with the Colonel and me in the old days and he pretended he liked me, and now I wish I'd poisoned him. (*Exit, closing door after her.*)

BLINN. So do I. (*He opens a cigarette box on sideboard.*) Plenty of cigarettes. (*Then rather aggressively to Susan, who is closing French windows.*) Look here, Susan, if that damned young fool wants cigars he'd better damned well bring them!

SUSAN. I think he smokes cigarettes.

BLINN. He'd jolly well better. (*He sits in arm-chair.*) Come here, my dear. (*She goes to him and sits on an arm of his chair.*) You love your old Nunkie, don't you? (*She throws an arm round his neck and gives him a hug.*) Then listen to my words of wisdom.

SUSAN. Don't I always, Nunkie?

BLINN. Between you and me—you and I—whichever it is.

SUSAN. You and me.

BLINN. You ought to know—between ourselves the position is desperate. I need money so badly that I feel I could tear it off somebody with my own hands. I've gone straight all my life—but now—(*mock seriously*)—I feel I'm slipping.

SUSAN (*taking his humor*). I have a slithery feeling, too.

BLINN. Don't be deceived in me, Susan, I'm unscrupulous!

SUSAN. So am I.

BLINN. I—(*he lowers his voice and glances round fearfully*)—I would rob.

SUSAN (*in the same spirit*). So would I.

BLINN. It's funny how catching it is. The trouble is, like all good things in life, it's come too late.

SUSAN. Nonsense, Nunkie, you're quite a young man.

BLINN. My day is over, my dear. Sometimes in the gloom I seem to see long white hands beckoning—beckoning. (*Susan puts a hand over his mouth to stop him.*)

SUSAN (*distressed*). Stop it, Nunkie!

BLINN (*taking her hand and holding it away*). And often when alone in the dead of night, I seem to hear voices calling—calling——

SUSAN (*rising*). Nunkie, will you please stop talking like that?

BLINN (*enjoying himself*). Harps, too—I always loved harp music. There's an old Johnny who sometimes plays outside the Bodega——

SUSAN. If you don't stop, I'll go away. (*Pointing to door C.*)

BLINN (*quickly*). Very well. Now to business. What about this young fellow? (*Susan goes to him and kneels on the floor at his side L. of chair.*)

SUSAN. You mean Mr. Guildford?

BLINN. Yes, what's he like?

SUSAN. But, Nunkie dear, you met him last year at Dinard.

BLINN. I was playing a system at baccarat at the time.

SUSAN. Well, he's—he's not bad, He used to take Auntie and me for motor rides.

BLINN. His own motor?

SUSAN. Of course.

BLINN (*pleased*). Oh!

SUSAN. His mother's very rich and he's the only child.

BLINN. Yes, I'd forgotten.

SUSAN. Their place is only fifteen miles from here. I expect he's motoring over.

BLINN. Good!

SUSAN. It'll take him about fifteen minutes.

BLINN. Good! He'll break his neck some day.

SUSAN. Don't be unkind.

BLINN. Do you love this young fellow?

SUSAN (*laughing*). Of course not!

BLINN. Then perhaps you'll tell me why we're spending all this good money on him!

SUSAN. For match-making, purposes, of course. He may like me.

BLINN. If the damned little fool doesn't, I'll break every bone——

SUSAN. But he does.

BLINN (*pleased*). Oh!

SUSAN. At least he did. At Dinard he told me he loved me.

BLINN (*very pleased*). I seem to remember him now—nice clean young fellow.

SUSAN. He asked me to marry him.

BLINN (*in amazement*). He asked you to—— (*Rises and crosses L. of table.*) Wait a bit, let's get this right. You mean to tell me that this nice clean young fellow, with his own motor-car, and groaning under his load of money—made you an honorable proposition and that you actually——

SUSAN (*breaking in*). I took it as fun.

BLINN. Fun! What is there funny about marriage?

SUSAN. Nothing, I suppose—but he was so young.
(*Rises.*)

BLINN. He was of age, wasn't he?

SUSAN. Yes, but only a baby. (*She rises.*)

BLINN. So much the better.

SUSAN. I was only a baby myself.

BLINN. Nonsense—women are born ten years older than men.

SUSAN. Besides, things weren't so bad with us in those days. (*Slyly.*) I remember you calculated your interest in the imitation India-rubber concern at a hundred thousand pounds.

BLINN (*savagely*). Thank you for reminding me.
(*Goes a little L.*)

SUSAN (*going to him and laying her hand on his arm*). And you must remember, Nunkie darling, we hadn't then made up our minds to be unscrupulous. (*Coming to Blinn.*)

BLINN (*looking down on her and smiling*). No more we had. (*He passes his arm around her neck and they sway together affectionately during the following lines.*) I somehow feel more light-hearted since we did.

SUSAN. So do I.

BLINN. In a kind of way one is uplifted.

SUSAN (*firmly*). Very.

BLINN (*slowly and distinctly, and with mock gravity*). We will ensnare this young man.

SUSAN (*in a similar tone*). We shall ensnare him.

BLINN. The altar yawns for him.

SUSAN. For him the altar gapes.

BLINN. And when you are firmly married to him——

SUSAN. As I intend.

BLINN. As you intend—any little kindness you can show your Aunt Georgie—who after all is your poor mother's only sister—I say, any little kindness——

SUSAN (*interrupting impulsively and throwing both arms round him*). Oh, Nunkie dear, don't you know that if I have any luck, I'll take care of Aunt Georgie always.

After all you've done for me I should be a little pig if I didn't share any good fortune with you both.

BLINN (*disengaging himself*). Hold hard, my dear—none of that. It's easier to get rid of one's scruples than one's pride. For your Aunt Georgie, yes—for me, no. No, no! I can look after myself. If you marry this young fellow, as you intend——

SUSAN. As I intend.

BLINN. I shall of course do the right thing. I shall give you a wedding present.

SUSAN (*smiling deprecatingly*). Oh, Nunkie!

BLINN. There reposes in a certain pawnbroker's shop just off Regent Street a picture—in fact—an oil-painting. It is a portrait of my dear old father. (*He listens.*) Listen! (*Slight pause. They both listen.*) A motor-car!

SUSAN. His motor-car!

BLINN. Our motor-car! (*He goes up and listens. Susan goes to a mirror to see if her hair is becoming. Then she arranges a flower in her dress.*) Susan!

SUSAN. Yes, Nunkie!

BLINN. Think well what you're doing. Think of sitting year in and year out, all your life, opposite the same human face—a face perhaps that you don't like. (*This too with mock gravity.*)

SUSAN. He hasn't a bad face.

BLINN. I wasn't thinking of bad faces. I was thinking of dull faces. However, you know best. (*Listens.*) There he is.

Enter Hogg, C.

HOGG. Mr. Guildford's in the drawing-room, sir.

SUSAN (*going to Blinn in a resolute manner and putting a hand on his arm*). Come on. (*Hogg remains in attendance, secretly grinning.*)

BLINN. No, you go on. I feel shy. (*Both their voices are slightly lowered.*)

SUSAN (*smiling but impatient*). Oh, don't be silly!

BLINN. Besides, I have to look over those samples.

SUSAN. Very well. (*Goes toward drawing-room door alone.*)

BLINN. I say, Susan (*calling her back*).

SUSAN. Yes?

BLINN. He's in hunting costume.

SUSAN (*surprized*). Who? Mr. Guildford?

BLINN. No—my dear old father. (*Susan makes a hit at him, misses him, and then makes a dignified exit to drawing-room. Hogg closes door after her.*) Where are those samples, Hogg? (*Going below sofa.*)

HOGG (*opening sideboard*). Here, sir. I've decanted the sherry and port. (*He puts out decanters.*)

BLINN. What else is there?

HOGG. Half a dozen champagne, sir.

BLINN (*hopefully*). Bottles?

HOGG (*firmly*). Pints, sir.

BLINN (*disappointed*). Oh!

HOGG. And there's a sample of old brandy—'63.

BLINN. Bottle?

HOGG. Pint, sir.

BLINN. Oh! . . . Give me a glass of sherry. (*Going up to sideboard. Hogg pours wine. Takes wine, tastes it critically and smacks his lips.*) How old are you Hogg?

HOGG. Thirty-six, sir.

BLINN. Good! How long have you been with me?

HOGG. Eleven years, sir.

BLINN. Good! How much do I owe you?

HOGG. Seventy pounds fifteen and eightpence, sir.

BLINN. Good! (*He drinks.*) Have you ever thought of joining up, Hogg?

HOGG (*slowly*). Well—no, sir—not to say seriously. But the news is pretty bad to-night.

BLINN (*with sudden violence*). I don't care a damn what it is; it's not my business. I wasn't consulted. (*Goes below sofa.*)

HOGG (*quietly*). No, sir. (*He starts to go.*)

BLINN. Empty a couple of pints of champagne into one of those glass jugs. It'll look better that way.

HOGG. Yes, sir. (*He takes two bottles from side-board. Distant sound of soldiers singing on march can be heard. They are marching to "Tipperary." Hogg, who was about to exit, stops.*)

BLINN. Listen!

HOGG. That's the lot from Blankwood returning from a route march, sir. (*Blinn goes up to window R., draws one of the curtains aside and listens. The sound comes nearer and includes the rhythmic tramping of feet. Blinn draws himself to his full height and assumes a military air. Even Hogg unconsciously becomes martial in attitude.*)

BLINN (*in a high manner*). They can prevent me being a soldier, but, by God! they can't prevent me feeling like one!

HOGG (*with respectful sympathy*). No, sir. (*He hesitates, looking at Blinn, then quietly goes off L. Exit Hogg, L. Blinn looks round to make sure Hogg is gone and that he is alone; then he takes a crumpled evening paper from sofa and starts reading, while the soldiers' singing can still be heard as from a great distance.*)

BLINN (*he reads aloud*). "In all her long history England has never faced anything approaching such a crisis." (*Slight pause while he reads to himself.*) "She will need every shilling of her colossal wealth; every able-bodied man of her population; every sinew of her tremendous latent strength." (*He continues reading to himself, and is profoundly interested and moved. The soldiers' singing can still be heard, very distant. The curtain slowly falls.*)

ACT II

SAME SCENE.—A few minutes later. On Welsh dresser when curtain rises has been placed butler's tray with three sets of four plates, also dish of olives.

Enter Hogg with final things for table, including sardines, which he puts on Welsh dresser. He arranges decanters and doesn't fail to fortify himself with half a glass of sherry. The collar of his coat is turned up at the back.

Enter Parsons.

PARSONS. The duck's ready when you are.

HOGG. Good. (*He puts the empty sherry glass on salver Parsons is carrying and takes from it a rack of toast which he puts on table.*)

PARSONS (*puts salver and glass on Welsh dresser*). Look at your collar. (*She turns it down for him.*)

HOGG. Thank you, Parsons. (*Hogg straightens his hair, then opens drawing-room door, which he steps through, but remains in sight of audience.*) Dinner is served, ma'am. (*He returns and stands in attendance while the others enter.*)

Enter Blinn and Susan, then Ripley Guildford and Mrs. Corbett. Susan is on Blinn's arm and Mrs. Corbett is on Guildford's. The entrance is made in silence and with ceremony.

Guildford is slender, nice-looking, and very much the type of young English aviator. He is twenty-four. He is in ordinary "dinner jacket" clothes.

Mrs. Corbett, who has finished dressing, looks very smart, although her gown is of the fashion of the pre-

vious year. Her hair is a poem and her manners are perfect. They advance to the table.

MRS. CORBETT (*sweetly*). Will you sit here, Mr. Guildford? (*She sits.*)

BLINN. Will you sit there, Susan. (*Table-napkins are unrolled and Hogg bustles to his duties. There ensues the short nervous silence that generally happens at the beginning of dinner. Blinn breaks it.*)

POSITION AT TABLE.

MRS. C.



BLINN.



SUSAN.



GUILDFORD.



BLINN (*cheerily, drawing his chair closer to the table*). Well, well! (*Parsons serves out plates for sardines.. Hogg brings olives and puts them in front of Susan.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Hasn't it been wonderful weather, Mr. Guildford?

GUILDFORD. Absolutely ripping!

MRS. CORBETT. Will you have an olive, Mr. Guildford!

GUILDFORD (*taking one, first offering Susan one*). Thanks awfully. (*He passes the olives to Blinn, who takes one.*)

BLINN (*to Mrs. Corbett*). Are these olives from Spain or Italy, my dear?

MRS. CORBETT (*innocently*). They came from the grocer, dear.

BLINN (*imperturbably*). Dear, dear! Well, well!

GUILDFORD. These big green ones are Spanish. The Italian are those little purple blighters.

BLINN. Ah, yes!—all skin and stones. (*Susan, who has nibbled at an olive and then put it down, has great*

difficulty in keeping from laughing at Blinn's affected and humorous manner.) (To Susan with much solicitude.) Why, child, you're eating nothing!

SUSAN. I'm not very hungry, thank you, Nunkie. (*Hogg offers sardines to Mrs. Corbett and then continues round.*)

BLINN. Not hungry! Well, well!

MRS. CORBETT (*with much sociability*). You have been in Italy, Mr. Guildford? (*Hogg serves the sardines.*)

GUILDFORD. Rather. I was there with mother last year. (*Mrs. Corbett takes a sardine.*) Mother's great on Italy. (*Hogg offers sardines to Guildford, who is too busy talking to Mrs. Corbett to notice.*) She knows where all the best works of art are and has the catalogues by heart. I can tell you, when mother starts reading up a subject— No, thank you.

BLINN (*interrupting and coming to Hogg's rescue*). Won't you have a sardine, Guildford?

GUILDFORD. Oh, yes—beg pardon—rather! (*He helps himself.*)

BLINN (*to Guildford*). When one is tired of soles and salmon the sardine is a pretty good bird. Have another? They're very small.

GUILDFORD. Thanks—yes—rather. (*Susan helps him to another sardine. Hogg then hands sardines to Parsons, who exits with them L.*)

BLINN. The sardine, sir, is the skylark of the ocean.

MRS. CORBETT. Don't be absurd, Blinn. Sardines don't sing.

BLINN. How do we know what pranks the little beggars get up to in their native element. . . . A glass of sherry with your fish, Guildford? (*The decanter of sherry is on the table.*)

GUILDFORD. Thanks awfully—rather. (*Guildford helps himself to sherry and passes decanter to Blinn.*)

BLINN. This is a sherry. (*Tasting the sherry.*)

Susan drops her table-napkin and stoops to recover it. Guildford tries to help her.

GUILDFORD. Do let me! (*Their heads gently collide.*)

SUSAN. Oh!

GUILDFORD. Ever so sorry!

SUSAN. Not at all. (*Blinn meanwhile has tasted his sherry and is holding the remainder to the light. Susan and Guildford recover the table-napkin together. They are oblivious to Blinn's remark. Mrs. Corbett is busy with a sardine.*)

GUILDFORD. I didn't hurt you?

SUSAN. Not in the least.

GUILDFORD. Jolly clumsy of me.

SUSAN. Oh, no—— (*They are smiling at each other in some embarrassment.*)

BLINN (*raising his voice*). I said, "This is a sherry!" (*They all start to attention and raise their glasses. They drink.*) That sherry, sir, comes out of the Royal cellars.

GUILDFORD. No? By Jove!

BLINN. Mr. Guildford said, "No, by Jove!" No doubt he means, Yes, by Jove!

GUILDFORD. Yes—rather!

BLINN. Now, I ask you, Guildford, as a connoisseur and a man of the world, isn't that sherry cheap at eighty-four shillings a dozen?

GUILDFORD. I should call it a gift.

MRS. CORBETT (*brightly*). Twelve seven's are eighty-four.

BLINN (*drily*). Thank you, Georgie. I think I could put you on to a few dozen of this wine, Guildford.

GUILDFORD. It's frightfully good of you, Mr. Corbett, but I live with mother.

BLINN (*patiently*). That must be extremely nice for you both.

GUILDFORD. I don't know what wines she has in the cellars. She keeps the keys herself. Good judge too, what? (*He laughs.*) But she gets everything from Berry Brothers, in St. James's Street. (*Pause.*)

BLINN. Really! Dear, dear! How interesting! I seem to have heard the name. (*Hogg removes the plates.*)

GUILDFORD. You've never met mother, Mrs. Corbett?

MRS. CORBETT (*kindly*). No—but I'm sure she must be very nice.

GUILDFORD. Oh, she's all right so long as you let her have her own way. When you don't, you cease to exist. I used to buck when I was a kid; now I'm old and wise.

BLINN. Your estimable mother seems to be a person of considerable strength of character. Another glass of sherry? (*He fills Guildford's glass.*)

GUILDFORD. Yes, thanks, rather! It's always long odds on mother.

BLINN. Sounds like my dear old father.

GUILDFORD. Was he hot stuff?

BLINN. Was he? (*He makes a gesture of warming his hands by a fire.*)

GUILDFORD (*delighted*). I get you! So is mother.

MRS. CORBETT (*gravely*). I don't think I can let you talk like that of your mother.

GUILDFORD. Oh, mother's all right, and I'm fond of her—but she needs tackling all the same.

MRS. CORBETT. I often wish I'd had a son. (*Susan laughs.*) You needn't laugh, Susan, I'm serious.

SUSAN. Whatever would you have done with one, Auntie?

MRS. CORBETT (*seriously*). I should have loved him—and—and given him my life.

Enter Parsons triumphantly, with the duck and two vegetable dishes on tray, which she hands to Hogg on Welsh dresser. She puts tray against wall by door.

BLINN. What have you there, Parsons?

PARSONS. Ducks, sir.

BLINN. Ducks! Well, well! I hope you like duck, Guildford?

GUILDFORD. Yes, thanks, awfully. I had one for lunch the other day. (*The others exchange glances.*)

BLINN. You seem to do yourself pretty well.

GUILDFORD. I'd been flying all the morning and was as hungry as a bear. I've taken up flying—and just between ourselves—my game is to join the Flying Corps—only mother mustn't know—not until I've prepared the ground—she'd kick!

MRS. CORBETT. I should think she would, and I shouldn't blame her. (*Hogg serves duck, Parsons hands it to Mrs. Corbett and Blinn, then to Guildford and Susan. Parsons follows with vegetables.*) Land I can understand and water I can put up with, but when you're in the air—well, where are you? (*She accepts vegetables from Parsons.*)

GUILDFORD (*warmly*). But, don't you see, Mrs. Corbett, a chap's got to do something, and I was made for the air because I'm a feather-weight and a feather-head, and I've always had a kind of knack in handling machines and motors.

SUSAN (*to Blinn*). Mr. Guildford drives a car better than any one I know. (*Hogg fills glasses with champagne from a carafe.*)

BLINN (*drinking*). Really now!

GUILDFORD. I dare say you think me a silly ass, Mrs. Corbett, and I'm sure I am—but aviation is going to make history in this war. (*Parsons is offering him vegetables—he doesn't see.*) Why, if you only knew—

BLINN (*breaking in*). Don't let us talk war, because none of us knows anything about it. Oh, have some peas, Guildford—out of our own garden. (*Mrs. Corbett and Susan smile at each other.*)

GUILDFORD. Oh, yes. Thanks. Rather. (*Helps himself.*) Yours isn't a military family, then?

BLINN. Only for fourteen generations; but the fighting spirit's petered out. I'm a man of peace, myself.

MRS. CORBETT (*suddenly flaming out indignantly and with growing emotion*). I won't have you say that, Blinn! It isn't true and I won't have it! (*In her excitement she stands.*) He's no more a man of peace than

I am, Mr. Guildford. He was one of the smartest officers in the army until—until he retired—and now, of course, he's—beyond the age. But in South Africa he used to be called "fighting Blinn," and——

BLINN. Ssh! Georgie!

MRS. CORBETT. Well, if you want me to "Ssh," you'll stop running yourself down (*she is nearly crying*) and making me think that—that—if it hadn't been for me——

SUSAN (*laying a hand on her arm*). Uncle Blinn was only making fun, dear.

MRS. CORBETT. I dare say—but I know what's in his heart—— (*She wipes her eyes and sits down.*)

BLINN (*firmly*). Georgie dear, a glass of wine with you.

MRS. CORBETT (*recovering a little*). Oh, well!

BLINN (*with a sudden inspiration*). No, one moment. (*He rises, glass in hand.*) His Majesty the King! (*The others immediately rise.*)

GUILDFORD, SUSAN, and MRS. CORBETT. The King! (*They all drink in silence, then sit. In this incident Parsons and Hogg conduct themselves appropriately. On its conclusion Parsons carries out the remains of the duck.*)

BLINN. Georgie, dear. (*He reaches over to touch her glass with his.*) My love. (*Susan and Guildford hold hands till Mrs. Corbett says "Silly old thing."*)

MRS. CORBETT. And mine! (*She drinks and smiles.*) Silly old thing! (*Hogg removes Mrs. Corbett's and Blinn's plate, Parsons Guildford's and Susan's.*)

GUILDFORD. Then you were in the Boer war, Mr. Corbett?

BLINN (*indifferently*). Nothing out of the way.

MRS. CORBETT (*eagerly*). Yes, and he was mentioned in dispatches and wounded three times. (*Parsons furnishes fresh plates.*)

GUILDFORD (*with a boy's admiration*). I say! By Jove!

BLINN (*to change the topic*). How do you like Californian peaches, Guildford?

GUILDFORD. I don't think I've ever had any, sir.

BLINN. No? Dear, dear! (*To Hogg, who is at Welsh dresser.*) Have you any Californian peaches, Hogg?

HOGG. These are Californian, sir. (*He raises the dish.*)

BLINN. Really! Well, well! A coincidence! (*Hogg serves peaches successively to Mrs. Corbett and Blinn, who both refuse them, Guildford, and Susan.*) You'll find them sweeter if anything than the English hot-house peach, and in color yellow. I believe they send them over in some kind of tin. (*Susan and Mrs. Corbett laugh.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*to Blinn, affectionately*). What an old goose you are!

(*They all eat peaches.*)

BLINN. Hogg! (*Hogg is now offering peaches to Susan, after which he puts them on sideboard.*)

HOGG. Yes, sir?

BLINN. Coffee? (*In this connection he appears doubtful.*)

HOGG (*reassuringly*). Yes, sir. (*Exit Hogg and Parsons, taking with them duck and all used plates, etc., from Welsh dresser upon butler's tray.*)

BLINN (*to Mrs. Corbett*). It seems to me, Georgie, that you and I might have our coffee in the drawing-room. There are some household matters to talk over and checks to write. (*He pushes back his chair.*) Guildford will excuse us, I'm sure. (*He takes his chair R., and places it below the fireplace against wall.*)

GUILDFORD. Oh, yes, rather. (*Rises.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*rising, going round table R. to Guildford*). I hope you don't find us too unconventional, Mr. Guildford.

GUILDFORD. Oh, no, rather not. I'm having a frightfully good time.

MRS. CORBETT (*very simply and touching his shoulder*). You are a dear boy and I like you.

BLINN (*softly*). Well, well. (*He goes up and opens door for Mrs. Corbett. Guildford, wearing a self-satisfied smile, goes a little R. Exit Mrs. Corbett.*) You will see that our young friend has everything he wants, Susan.

SUSAN. Oh, yes, Nunkie—everything. (*Exit Blinn.*)

GUILDFORD. I say—isn't he a wonder! (*He returns to table.*)

SUSAN. Yes. Have some more peaches?

GUILDFORD. I will if you will. (*He brings his own chair round next Susan's.*)

SUSAN (*rising*). Of course I will.

GUILDFORD. Let me——

SUSAN. No, you sit down. I like it. Give me your plate, will you? (*She brings dish of peaches from side-board.*)

GUILDFORD. They're jolly good. (*He sits.*)

SUSAN. Not bad. Let's finish the dish. (*She helps him liberally from the dish which she has placed on the table.*)

GUILDFORD. I'm game. Here! don't give me all the dish! (*stopping her*) Fair do's. Halves, you know,

SUSAN. All right. (*She takes the rest herself.*)

GUILDFORD. Yes, your uncle's a wonder. You never know when he's serious. (*They both eat heartily.*)

SUSAN. Never.

GUILDFORD. And funny! By Jove!

SUSAN. Isn't he?

GUILDFORD. And yet you're frightened to laugh—just in case!

SUSAN. I know.

GUILDFORD (*using his table-napkin, having finished his peaches*). Dev'lish good peaches. I must tell mother about 'em.

SUSAN (*wisely*). I shouldn't bother. (*She pushes her plate away.*)

GUILDFORD (*with a change of tone*). I say—you don't suppose he saw me holding your hand?

SUSAN. I don't think so. Why did you?

GUILDFORD. I don't know. Cheek, wasn't it?

SUSAN. Yes.

GUILDFORD. But there's something about holding hands—what is it, I wonder.

SUSAN. I don't know.

GUILDFORD. They say it's something to do with electricity. Do you remember at Dinard I used to steer the car with the right hand and hold yours with the left—under the rug?

SUSAN. I've forgotten—except that you were very reckless. You used to make Auntie nervous.

GUILDFORD (*enthusiastically*). I say, isn't she a dear.

SUSAN. She's a darling.

GUILDFORD. Somehow, you're all—in a way—different to other people.

SUSAN. I'm sure we are.

GUILDFORD (*with conviction*). Much nicer.

SUSAN. Oh, much!

GUILDFORD. I don't want to grouse, but everything is so rigid and formal at home—not a bit happy-go-lucky.

SUSAN. Perhaps that's because you're rich.

GUILDFORD. Well, I dare say that has something to do with it. (*Lifting her right hand which is lying on table.*) I say! By Jove!

SUSAN. What?

GUILDFORD (*confused*). Nothing! (*Slight pause, then he grins.*) Do you feel it?

SUSAN. What—your hand?

GUILDFORD. No—the electricity.

SUSAN. Not particularly.

GUILDFORD. Kind of tingling?

SUSAN. No—it's only warm.

(*Enter Hogg with coffee tray. Guildford drops Susan's hand. Susan, after a moment's pause, continues to speak,*

very artificially, to cover the interruption Hogg's presence makes.) Warm, as you say, for October, but I suppose when you're in the air——

GUILDFORD (*breaking in rather confusedly*). Oh, yes, rather!

SUSAN. Rather what?

GUILDFORD (*with a baleful glance at Hogg, who is collecting the dessert plates*). Rather a bore.

SUSAN (*affecting surprise, but secretly amused*). What, flying?

GUILDFORD. Flying? Oh, no! (*Slight pause.*) Flying's top-hole! (*Hogg serves coffee.*) (*Guildford and Susan each take a cup from Hogg's tray and help themselves to sugar. Hogg goes up to drawing-room door and exits. Directly he is gone Guildford makes a snatch to recover Susan's hand. Susan evades him.*)

SUSAN. Careful! He's coming back.

GUILDFORD (*half crossly*). Oh, of course he would! (*Pause. They both repeatedly and impatiently look at the drawing-room door.*)

Enter Hogg. Susan and Guildford raise their cups and appear to be solemnly drinking. Hogg glances discreetly at the young couple, then, concealing a smile, walks sedately to the door L, and exits. Meanwhile Susan drinks her coffee. After Hogg's exit she rises and walks away. Suddenly she begins to laugh.) What's the matter? (*He rises.*)

SUSAN. Have you ever been unscrupulous?

GUILDFORD. Good Heavens, no!

SUSAN (*insistently*). Never in your life?

GUILDFORD (*relaxing slightly*). Oh, well——

SUSAN. Ah! (*Accusingly.*)

GUILDFORD (*bravely*). I stole a shilling once——when I was a kid.

SUSAN. Oh, how did you feel?

GUILDFORD. Pretty rotten.

SUSAN. Until you put it back.

GUILDFORD. But I never put it back.

SUSAN. But you owned up?

GUILDFORD. Never. (*Grins.*) It was mother's.

SUSAN (*disappointed*). Oh! You're only an amateur.

GUILDFORD. Can't we sit on the sofa? (*Going to her. She is rearranging the two sofa cushions.*)

SUSAN. That's what it's for. (*She sits and he sits beside her. He takes her hand.*)

GUILDFORD. I love talking to you, but you must find it dull, because I'm the silliest ass in the world.

SUSAN. I begin to doubt you.

GUILDFORD. You needn't. You remember the time I was idiot enough to propose to you at Dinard.

SUSAN. What was there specially idiotic about that?

GUILDFORD. Oh, nothing—because I was frightfully gone on you—as I am now—only I was in trouble at the time.

SUSAN. In trouble?

GUILDFORD. Yes—over a girl—but I was trusting to mother to get me out of it.

SUSAN (*taking her hand away*). How did you dare!

GUILDFORD. The truth is, Susan, that up to the time I met you I'd been an awful blighter and had a horrible career. I was always getting into scrapes. That's why even now when I'm grown up and quite steady, mother's always on my track.

SUSAN. You must have been a horrid boy.

GUILDFORD. I was. Knowing *you* changed me.

SUSAN. Of course you're bound to say that.

GUILDFORD. No. I mean it frightfully. (*Simply and sincerely.*) I adore you, Susan.

SUSAN. That's very kind of you, Ripley.

GUILDFORD. I wasn't really sure of it at Dinard——

SUSAN. Although you proposed to me.

GUILDFORD. Yes. But I was still a young blighter then. But when I met you again the other day, it came over me like a great wave——

SUSAN. Oh!

GUILDFORD (*staring moodily in front of him*). Now

I'm like a man drowned—for, of course, I can't propose to you again after what I've told you.

SUSAN (*startled*). Oh!

GUILDFORD. Well, can I?

SUSAN (*reluctantly*). Well, no—I suppose not.

GUILDFORD. I never had any luck. (*Puts his hand on hers.*)

SUSAN. Poor Ripley.

GUILDFORD. And I suppose I'm doomed to buzz around until the right fellow comes along—one of those clean-living blighters without a past—but with his hair brushed back and a long upper lip.

SUSAN. That kind of man wouldn't permit you to hold my hand. (*She lifts his hand from hers and places it on his own lap.*)

GUILDFORD. No—damn him! (*Slight pause.*) I say, Susan—I suppose you wouldn't let me—just once—(*He advances his face towards her; she draws hers back.*) I mean—kiss you—just to show me all I've lost—to bally well rub it in.

SUSAN (*raising a hand between their faces*). Certainly not. I couldn't kiss a man I wasn't engaged to; and, as you say, you can't propose to me, and I certainly can't propose to you.

GUILDFORD. Susan, isn't there—isn't there any chance for me? (*He falls on his knees.*)

SUSAN (*coolly*). There doesn't seem any way of finding out.

GUILDFORD. Susan! Come here. (*He pulls her rather roughly down to him; they are both kneeling on the floor in front of the sofa.*) This is frightfully serious. It's different to anything else I've ever felt. And I'll tell you why. It's because it's grown-up love. All the rest was only—Oh, I don't know how to express it—but I tell you I love you altogether—for ever. Will you marry me?

SUSAN. Yes, Ripley.

GUILDFORD. Oh, you priceless darling! (*They are in*

each other's arms. He suddenly holds her away.) Do you love me—really?

SUSAN. Yes, Ripley. *(He again takes her in his arms.)*

Enter Blinn. (He looks round and affects to see nobody.)

BLINN. Dear, dear! Well, well! *(Enter Mrs. Corbett.)*

MRS. CORBETT. Where are they? *(She powders her face at mirror R.)*

BLINN. Gone, my dear. Vanished into thin air. That's the danger of those flying chaps.

SUSAN. You'd better be careful what you say about us.

BLINN. What! Hello! Why, what are you doing on the floor when there are a lot of nice, expensive chairs?

GUILDFORD *(helping Susan to her feet)*. Susan's promised to marry me, Mr. Corbett; isn't she a ripper?

BLINN. Well, I'm damned!

MRS. CORBETT *(going to them)*. What! You two! Not really? How wonderful! How beautiful! *(Tearfully.)* But it's really rather upsetting. *(She dabs her eyes with her handkerchief. Her emotion is quite real.)* Blinn, dear, aren't they a pair of darlings? Where are you? *(She turns. He is quietly avoiding her, foreseeing an embrace. She goes after him.)* I haven't been so moved since you and I—— After all, Love is the greatest thing in life. *(He evades her round arm-chair.)* Blinn! *(Impatiently and tearfully.)* Will you stop when I want to kiss you?

BLINN. It's all right, old girl. *(He puts his arm round her and lays her face against his shoulder. He pats her face and kisses her. They whisper together R. Susan and Guildford also whisper L. To Mrs. Corbett.)* Oughtn't you to embrace the young man? I believe it's usual. *(As she goes, Blinn picks up his champagne glass from table and takes it up to sideboard and fills it.)*

MRS. CORBETT. Why, of course! (*She crosses to the others.*) Mr. Guildford——

SUSAN. His Christian name's Ripley, Aunt Georgie.

MRS. CORBETT. Ripley! What a pretty name! (*She rests her hands on the shoulders of Guildford, who is a little embarrassed.*) Ripley, I liked you when I first met you, and I like you even more now. I'm sure you are good and true, and that you will make our dear girl happy. Love is the greatest thing in all the world, dear Ripley—always remember that. Bless you! (*She enfolds him in a large embrace. Mrs. Corbett, Susan and Ripley are now below the sofa L.*)

Enter quietly Hogg and Parsons. They proceed unobtrusively and quietly to clear the table. Blinn comes down below table R., and stands glass in hand waiting for an audience. Mrs. Corbett releases Guildford.

BLINN (*clearing his throat and in the manner of one beginning a speech*). The sentiments which —— (*the others take no notice of him.*)

GUILDFORD (*unconsciously interrupting*). Thank you, dear Mrs. Corbett. (*Susan brushes powder off Guildford's coat.*)

BLINN (*patiently, and in the manner as before*). The sentiments which my dear wife——

SUSAN (*unconsciously interrupting and taking Guildford's arm*). Isn't he a dear boy, Auntie?

MRS. CORBETT (*warmly*). He is absolutely the nicest and dearest boy I have ever——

BLINN (*breaking in with cold wrath*). May I be permitted to speak in my own house?

SUSAN. Ssh, Auntie! Nunkie has something to say.

MRS. CORBETT (*kindly*). What is it, Blinn dear? (*Sits in R. corner of sofa. Exit Hogg with tray L.*)

BLINN (*coldly and emphatically*). I was endeavoring, under considerable difficulty, to remark—— (*Parsons drops flap of table noisily. There is a tragic pause.*)

MRS. CORBETT AND SUSAN (*with gentle reproof*). Parsons!

PARSONS. Sorry, ma'am. (*Blinn stands with his eyes closed and wearing the expression of a martyr. He is still holding his champagne glass. Meanwhile Hogg re-enters and hastens to Parsons' assistance. They lower the other flap of the table, leaving a chair on either side of the latter; the top chair [Mrs. Corbett's] is placed by Hogg against the back wall and he also places the flower bowl on the table, and a cigarette ash tray. Then exeunt Hogg and Parsons.*)

BLINN (*towards the conclusion of the business described, still with his eyes closed.*) Are they gone? (*Slight pause.*)

SUSAN. Now, Nunkie, dear. (*She and Guildford are all attention. Mrs. Corbett's thoughts, however, are evidently wandering.*)

BLINN. Am I being favored with your attention, Georgie?

MRS. CORBETT (*starting to attention.*) Certainly, darling.

BLINN (*shifting his feet to a firmer attitude.*) The sentiments which my dear wife has expressed to dear young Guildford cannot have failed to awaken a sympathetic echo in the hearts of all present. (*A slight murmur of approval from the others.*) The sudden and quite unexpected engagement of our dear niece to young Guildford, whose Christian name I grieve to say has already escaped my memory—

MRS. CORBETT (*gladly.*) Ripley.

BLINN. Thank you, Georgie. Where was I, Susan?

SUSAN. The engagement of your dear niece to dear young Guildford.

BLINN. Exactly. Reminds us of Shakespeare's beautiful line to the effect that marriages are made in Heaven.

GUILDFORD. Hear, hear! (*Mrs. Corbett and Susan frown him down.*)

BLINN. In carrying out its designs Heaven sometimes permits itself to employ human agencies. My dear niece will catch my meaning.

SUSAN. Perfectly, dear Nunkie.

BLINN. The poet also says that some are born to be married, some achieve marriage, and some have marriage thrust upon them. However that may be, it is our pleasant duty to raise our glasses——

MRS. CORBETT (*innocently*). But I haven't got a glass!

BLINN (*with slight irritation*). It isn't necessary that you should have, my dear. Don't you understand that I am representing the good feeling of us all? I repeat, it is our pleasant duty to raise my glass and drink to the long life, the health and prosperity—— (*A prolonged motor-siren is heard—one of those things with a crescendo and diminuendo. It breaks off Blinn's speech. Blinn's glass wobbles slightly and a little of his champagne is spilled.*) (*In a lowered voice.*) Some one is walking over my grave!

GUILDFORD (*tragically*). Mother! (*Slight pause. Then Guildford runs to window R., pulls aside the curtains and looks out.*)

BLINN (*testily*). What's he mean—"Mother"? (*He hastily drains the glass and puts it on sideboard.*)

GUILDFORD (*hoarsely*). Yes, the car's stopped at the gate! Mother's getting out. She's followed me. (*During this scene Mrs. Corbett's expression and manner show that she doesn't understand why the others should be so disturbed.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*innocently*). Well, why shouldn't she?

BLINN (*in a tone of intrigue*). The great thing is not to be embarrassed. (*His incorrigible sense of humor is again paramount.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*innocently*). Why should any one be embarrassed?

GUILDFORD. Oh, isn't this like her! (*To Blinn.*) I only told her I was coming to dine with you. I—I didn't mention any one else.

BLINN. Well, it seems fairly clear that you must introduce her.

SUSAN (*crossing Blinn to Ripley*). I think it would be better if Ripley and I happened to be walking in the garden. There's nothing so natural as walking in a garden.

GUILDFORD (*gladly, to Blinn*). Yes, and that would give you and dear Mrs. Corbett a chance of breaking the ice.

MRS. CORBETT (*pouting*). You're all perfectly ridiculous. One would think we were conspirators. (*She goes over to mirror R.*)

BLINN (*not noticing Mrs. Corbett and addressing Susan*). What I thought was that you and I might be walking in the garden, and Georgie and Ripley might be playing backgammon——

MRS. CORBETT (*over her shoulder as she powders her nose*). I shan't. I hate backgammon.

SUSAN (*firmly*). Certainly not, Nunkie! It'll look much better for you to be with Aunt Georgie. Come on, Ripley! (*She and Guildford go to French window.*)

BLINN (*resignedly*). Very well—you execute your flank movement, but don't be long about it. (*Exeunt Susan and Guildford. Enter Hogg with spirit tray, which he places on sideboard. These movements are practically simultaneous.*) Hogg, Mrs. Guildford is calling. You will show her in here.

HOGG. Yes, sir. (*Bell is heard. Exit Hogg C.*)

BLINN (*listening*). There she is. Now when you've finished powdering your nose, darling——

MRS. CORBETT (*turning from mirror*). Well?

BLINN. Come and sit here (*indicating chair L. of table. She does so. Blinn goes to bookshelves.*)

MRS. CORBETT. But I don't want to sit.

BLINN. Don't argue, my dear. (*He selects a volume at random, opens it and places it in her hands.*) You shall be discovered reading to me.

MRS. CORBETT. But I don't want to read, and I hate all this mystery.

BLINN (*soothingly*). Everything is being arranged for the best. The thing to aim at is a picture of perfect domestic felicity. I shall have dozed off here. (*He sits on sofa and hangs his handkerchief over his eyes.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*contemptuously, after glancing at the book*). Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." I've never been able to understand a word of it.

BLINN (*raising handkerchief for a moment from his face*). Read, darling, read—quite simply and naturally. (*Slight pause.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*begins to read a passage from Gibbon*). "Besides their arms, which the legionaries scarcely considered as an encumbrance, they were laden with their kitchen furniture, the instruments of fortification, and the provisions of many days. Under this weight, which would oppress the delicacy of a modern soldier——"

Enter Hogg, followed by Mrs. Guildford. Mrs. Guildford is a very great lady indeed, to the point of being awe-inspiring. She is about forty-eight and her dominant expression is one of inflexible resolution. She is beautifully dressed, appropriately to her age and position and the time of day.

HOGG (*announcing*). Mrs. Guildford. (*She comes down slowly R. of table. Exit Hogg by door L. Mrs. Corbett lays down the volume and rises.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*coming forward, and in her best manner*). How do you do? (*They shake hands.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD (*coldly*). Good evening. You are—— (*She hesitates.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Mrs. Corbett.

MRS. GUILDFORD. Oh, indeed! My son told me he was dining with a Mr. Corbett whom he met at Dinard. He didn't mention—— (*Blinn breathes so heavily as to almost snore. Mrs. Guildford breaks off and turns.*)

MRS. CORBETT. He didn't mention me? How neglect-

ful of him. Blinn! (*Slight pause. Both women look at him. Mrs. Corbett raises her voice.*) Blinn!

BLINN (*affecting to wake*). Eh? What? Oh! Dear, dear! (*He rises.*) So sorry!

MRS. CORBETT. Mrs. Guildford—my husband.

BLINN. How do you do? (*They shake hands.*) Do sit down. (*He gives her a chair R. of table. She sits.*) I really must apologize. My wife was reading to me Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," and I must have dozed off. (*Mrs. Corbett gives him an indignant look. Blinn stands with his back to the fire, Mrs. Corbett is standing L. of table.*) Dear old Gibbon! A hardy fellow—but a trifle turgid, don't you think—eh?

MRS. GUILDFORD (*coldly*). On the contrary, Mr. Corbett, I regard him as a historian of considerable genius. However, as it is getting late and I've only called for my son—(*she looks round*) whom, by the way, I fail to see——

MRS. CORBETT. The dear boy is in the garden—and he is a dear boy. We've quite taken him to our hearts, haven't we, Blinn?

BLINN. Nice clean young fellow.

MRS. GUILDFORD. I'm glad Ripley has made so favorable an impression, but the truth is that, although he is full of amiable qualities, he is rather erratic and irresponsible, and is apt to get into all sorts of mischief.

BLINN (*with false sympathy*). Dear, dear! Well, well!

MRS. CORBETT. You surprise me, Mrs. Guildford.

MRS. GUILDFORD. Less than he would surprise you if you knew him well. He makes all kinds of queer friendships——

BLINN. I should judge the young fellow to be full of democratic impulses.

MRS. GUILDFORD. Extremely so; and it's kind of you to put it so nicely, Mr. Corbett. That explains this rather unceremonious visit, for which I ought to apologize.

MRS. CORBETT. Not at all. We're delighted. (*Sits in chair L. of table.*)

BLINN. Charmed—absolutely charmed!

MRS. GUILDFORD. It is a great relief to me to find that on this occasion at least my son has made—er—suitable friends. (*She looks coldly from one to the other.*)

MRS. CORBETT. That is most nice of you. I envy you, Mrs. Guildford. I often wish that I had a——

BLINN (*quickly interrupting*). May I offer you a cigarette? (*To Mrs. Guildford.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD (*after a moment's hesitation*). Er—thank you. (*She accepts a cigarette. He lights a match for her. He then lights a cigarette. There is a pause. Mrs. Guildford and Blinn are apparently trying to think of something to say next, while Mrs. Corbett is in a reverie.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*more to herself than to them*). It must be wonderful to have a son—all your own. To see the little tot—your own flesh and blood—growing in body and mind from babyhood into boyhood, and from boyhood into——

BLINN (*crossing to behind table, interrupting quietly but firmly*). My dear, won't you smoke? (*Offers her cigarette.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*still rapt*). No, thanks.

MRS. GUILDFORD. You remind me to apologize for my son. It's very rude of him to meander alone in the garden while——

MRS. CORBETT (*interrupting*). Oh, he's not alone! he's with Susan.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*quickly*). Susan! Your daughter?

BLINN. My dear wife's niece.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*with affected interest*). Really!

MRS. CORBETT. The orphaned child of my only sister.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*in the same tone*). Ah, yes! And she lives with you?

MRS. CORBETT. Yes, and she's *such* a dear girl. I don't know what we should do without her.

MRS. GUILDFORD. Need you?

MRS. CORBETT (*taken aback*). Well, I—— (*She looks doubtfully at Blinn.*)

BLINN. I wonder you didn't see the young folks in the garden. It's a brilliant night. (*Going back to fire-place.*)

MRS. CORBETT. There's a beautiful moon.

MRS. GUILDFORD. An ideal Ripley evening! (*She smiles sarcastically.*)

BLINN (*with apparent innocence*). Ripping!

MRS. CORBETT. Perhaps they were in the shrubbery.

MRS. GUILDFORD. If there *is* a shrubbery, that wouldn't surprise me.

MRS. CORBETT (*bridling*). Of course there's a shrubbery. If there hadn't been I shouldn't have mentioned one.

BLINN (*interrupting suavely*). A shrubbery is a place where there are shrubs. There is such a place in our garden. The fact that my dear wife mentioned a shrubbery is ample proof of its existence. (*He says the last sentence with gentle emphasis. Pause; then with slightly more emphasis*) I said, "The fact that my dear wife——"

MRS. GUILDFORD. Quite so. (*Stares in front of her.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Quite so. (*Stares in front of her.*)

BLINN (*gently and also staring in front of himself*). Quite so. (*Pause.*) It's wonderful how often a misunderstanding can be removed by the simplest possible explanation. (*Slight pause—an uncomfortable one.*) Well now, the existence of the shrubbery having been firmly established, one might venture to mention the croquet lawn. (*Mrs. Guildford looks up at him with the expression of one who thinks him "cracked." He smiles down on her blandly.*)

MRS. CORBETT. It's dreadfully neglected.

BLINN. Neglected, I admit—but this is war-time. Such a sporting little course, Mrs. Guildford, and full of unexpected qualities. You advance on your ball, having borrowed a mallet from the other player, and you're

just about to give it a terrific swipe, when it starts to roll away all on its own. But perhaps you don't play croquet? (*During this speech Mrs. Guildford puts down her cigarette on ash tray.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD (*firmly*). No, Mr. Corbett, I don't; but if I had a niece, I would not trust her out on a moonlight night, either in a shrubbery or on a neglected croquet lawn, with my son.

BLINN (*with mild surprise*). Really!—as bad as that!

MRS. CORBETT (*warmly*). I'd trust Susan anywhere with any one! I brought her up myself, and a girl of higher principles, or a stricter sense of what is right and dignified——

BLINN (*crossing again to back of table, interrupting with gentle firmness*). Well now, my dear, is that necessary in the circumstances? I repeat, "in the circumstances."

MRS. GUILDFORD. I am not in the least disposed to question the trustworthiness of the young lady, more particularly as I haven't the pleasure of her acquaintance.

BLINN (*cutting in sweetly*). It is a pleasure which shall not be denied you, dear lady.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*coldly*). I am obliged to you. (*She goes on as if there had been no interruption.*) But I chance to be well acquainted with my son, and I regret the necessity of warning you——

BLINN (*interrupting*). Wait! wait! One moment! Forgive me! I had intended that dear young Guildford should break the happy news to you himself, but as there seems a danger of your casting some reflection, quite without ill-feeling—mind, *quite without ill-feeling*—on the propriety of his conduct, I feel justified in anticipating him. Well, the truth is—(*he claps his hands and rubs them together, while he smiles broadly*)—you'll never guess—the truth is, the young people are engaged! (*Mrs. Guildford sits up and looks first at Blinn, who is looking smilingly into vacancy, and then at Mrs. Corbett.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Yes, actually engaged. (*She beams enthusiastically.*) And do you know, Mrs. Guildford, my husband and I hadn't been out of the room three minutes—had we, Blinn?

BLINN. Certainly not more than five.

MRS. CORBETT. And when we came back those children were pledged to each other and practically in each other's arms. I dare say you'll think me sentimental—Blinn always does—but it was so natural, so simple, and they looked such dears, that the tears came to my eyes. (*Mrs. Guildford begins to laugh, a rather dry, hard laugh. Mrs. Corbett looks surprised and offended.*)

BLINN. I can see a joke as quickly as most people, when it's carefully explained to me—but really—
(*Coming down L. of table.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD. You must forgive me, but if you knew Ripley as well as I do, I'm sure you would laugh too. This is the third time in the last ten months that he has become engaged at a moment's notice. (*Effect on Mrs. Corbett and Blinn. They exchange glances.*)

BLINN (*slowly*). Oh, really! (*Sits on R. arm of sofa.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD. In the two previous instances it fell to me to extricate him from extremely undesirable connections.

BLINN. I feel sure you rose to the occasions.

MRS. GUILDFORD. What adds to the absurdity of his proceedings is that he hasn't a penny of his own in the world. He's entirely dependent on me.

MRS. CORBETT. Poor boy! Poor dear Ripley!

MRS. GUILDFORD. I have never been accused of being niggardly.

MRS. CORBETT. I was thinking of that poor dear innocent boy falling into the hands of adventuresses.

MRS. GUILDFORD. The persons in question were effectually dealt with.

BLINN. For my part I have no doubt of it—not the faintest doubt of it.

MRS. CORBETT. Money isn't everything—love counts above all. I never had any money in my life, so I can speak feelingly. My father, who was a clergyman with a very poor living, used to allow us girls two shillings a week pocket money. (*Blinn becomes uneasy and at finish of speech puts his hand on Mrs. Corbett's shoulder.*) Certainly my first husband, the Colonel, had money enough; but he seemed always to need it all for himself, and when I ran away with Blinn and was divorced—

BLINN. Georgie, dear, you needn't trouble Mrs. Guildford with ancient history.

MRS. CORBETT. What does it matter? Everybody knows it.

BLINN. In that case, why rub it in? (*He goes to sideboard for a drink.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD (*interrupting with secret malice*). I live so much out of the world and hear nothing. Do go on, Mrs. Corbett. You were saying——?

MRS. CORBETT. I've forgotten what I was leading up to.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*encouragingly*). You abandoned the Colonel for your present husband—no doubt with sufficient cause. How spirited of you!

MRS. CORBETT (*simply*). I'm certainly not ashamed of it.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*apparently idly*). And I think you said you brought up your niece——

MRS. CORBETT. Yes.

MRS. GUILDFORD. No doubt on the liberal principles you yourself had put so romantically into practice. (*Pause. Mrs. Corbett slowly perceives she is being insulted. She rises.*)

MRS. CORBETT. What do you mean?

MRS. GUILDFORD. Well. (*She shrugs her shoulders.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*persistently*). Well? (*Blinn comes down.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD. But all this is rather idle, and I really must go. Mr. Corbett (*rising and moving to fire-*

place), would you be so good as to let my son know——

BLINN. Certainly, Mrs. Guildford. (*He moves to go, then stops*). Georgie dear, perhaps you——

MRS. CORBETT (*still indignant and looking at Mrs. Guildford*). What did you mean by "liberal principles"?

MRS. GUILDFORD. Well, you acknowledged some extremely unconventional, not to say irregular proceedings, and as you propose that my son should marry your niece——

MRS. CORBETT. You are mistaken. I——

BLINN (*interrupting from back of table between the two ladies*). The proposition came from young Guildford. (*To Mrs. Corbett.*) My dear, will you be so kind as to bring the young folks in here presently? I should like a few minutes' conversation with Mrs. Guildford first. (*He takes her towards the French window.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*still ruffled*). Mrs. Guildford presumed to judge me without knowing the facts. (*This is as much for Mrs. Guildford's benefit as Blinn's.*) I don't think that is very kind of her.

BLINN (*pointedly*). Mrs. Guildford hasn't the privilege of knowing you as well as I do. (*He kisses her hand very gallantly. She smiles at him, much gratified. Exit Mrs. Corbett. Blinn returns to Mrs. Guildford. He is smiling genially.*) I say, you nearly put your foot in it then!

MRS. GUILDFORD. I really don't know what you mean.

BLINN. Well, you were very nearly being rude to the best little woman in the world. In fact, you were——just a little, weren't you?

MRS. GUILDFORD (*stiffly*). I see no reason to reconsider anything I said.

BLINN. Not yet; not for the moment; but don't be discouraged, you will. (*Then seriously.*) What I want you to know is that I entertain a regard and admiration for my wife that amounts to something like a worship. I am telling you this in confidence. She probably doesn't know it. It naturally follows that any one who hurts

her, hurts me. (*Slight pause. Mrs. Guildford is stonily silent.*) Do have another cigarette! (*Offers her the box.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD. No, thank you.

BLINN (*in an oratorical manner and with a touch of mockery*). Returning for a moment to our domestic history, in which you evinced considerable interest just now, I must tell you that my wife ran away with me from a tyrant and oppressor of the worst description. The good old Colonel was, in truth, a horrible fellow. But you cannot have failed to notice the liberal tendencies that have been spreading over the world in the last quarter of a century. Freedom is in the air! My wife was a pioneer. History will be aware of her. (*Slight pause.*) Would you let me give you a glass of sherry?

MRS. GUILDFORD. No, thank you. (*She crosses to L. below sofa.*)

BLINN. As to the other matter in which we are both so interested—I mean the proposed marriage between your son and my wife's niece——

MRS. GUILDFORD (*interrupting*). Personally I'm not interested. The idea is ridiculous and impossible.

BLINN (*serenely*). On the contrary, as I shall proceed to show you. Of course in a sense we're all wrong. We have no right to discuss so sacred a matter in this cold-blooded way. What should have happened was that your son rushed home to you, told you of his good luck and begged you to help him. Then you would have called on my wife to-morrow, ingratiated yourself with her, and between you managed to win my approval. As it is, if we're not careful the whole scheme will be on the rocks.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*sarcastically*). I approve of the word scheme.

BLINN. Thank you. I knew you would. And in a sense—between ourselves—the scheme was my own.

MRS. GUILDFORD. I might have guessed it.

BLINN. I wonder you didn't. It was I who contrived

they should be left alone after dinner. I knew he was attracted to her and had talked of marriage at Dinard, and I considered them very suitable to each other. He's a nice young fellow—a particularly nice young fellow—not weighed into the dust with brains perhaps, but bright and willing, and not without prospects. In a word, he'll do and I like him. As for Susan, she's simply stunning, she has good looks, charm, a beautiful nature and distinction, and what so few women possess—a real sense of humor. In a word, they're a highly promising pair and well calculated to enrich the Empire with a bunch of what my dear wife calls "little tots," to be a glory to themselves and add interest and happiness to your and our old age.

MRS. GUILDFORD. Is your fantastic oration finished, Mr. Corbett?

BLINN. Very nearly. Finally, I am anxious—most anxious, dear Mrs. Guildford, that you should not be deceived for a moment in regard to Susan's financial position. She has only twelve shillings in the world—that is to say, she had twelve shillings this afternoon, but for reasons which need not be stated the sum has since been reduced to six and ninepence.

MRS. GUILDFORD. I don't know whether I'm to take you seriously.

BLINN. Certainly you are.

MRS. GUILDFORD. You seem to me to be a most extraordinary person.

BLINN. Please don't mention it.

MRS. GUILDFORD. Well, I'll be equally frank. I disapprove of the whole thing and will not lend myself to it in any way. I have no belief in Ripley as a married man—certainly not before he is thirty at least; and when he marries I hope it will be into a family in which the responsibilities of life are not regarded in a spirit of levity and derision.

BLINN. Dear lady—dear kind lady, one only tries to prove that it is possible to be poor without being dull.

There is written invisibly over the portals of this modest dwelling—

MRS. GUILDFORD (*interrupting firmly*). I am not interested in local inscriptions, and I really should be extremely obliged to you if you would kindly let my son know that I am waiting for him.

BLINN (*going towards French window*). Certainly—delighted now that everything's settled so satisfactorily.

MRS. GUILDFORD. Oh, then, you agree with me!

BLINN (*near the window—turning to her*). Naturally. The best way to bind lovers together is to tear them asunder. The thing is to make martyrs of them. Let's get to work. (*Mrs. Guildford for a moment looks a little startled, then she shrugs her shoulders and crosses over to fireplace.*) (*Calling through French window.*) Ripley! Hallo! Ripley!

GUILDFORD (*outside*). Hallo!

BLINN. Come here, there's a good boy. Your mother wants you.

GUILDFORD (*outside*). Coming. (*Blinn steps back up slightly. Enter Guildford and Susan. They come on quickly to C., hand in hand—Ripley almost dragging Susan forward. Enter Mrs. Corbett. Blinn passes his arm through hers and takes her up R.C. Guildford addresses his mother rather breathlessly.*) Mother, dear, it was awfully ripping of you to come.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*coldly*). I thought it advisable.

GUILDFORD. You were right because—because now you've met dear Mr. and Mrs. Corbett—and this, mother—(*bringing Susan a little more forward*)—this is Susan. (*Introducing.*) Susan—Mother—I mean—Mother—Susan. (*Susan comes slightly forward.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD (*stiffly*). How do you do?

SUSAN (*recoiling from Mrs. Guildford's frigid manner, goes below sofa.*) Good evening. (*Slight pause.*)

GUILDFORD. Well?

MRS. GUILDFORD. Well?

GUILDFORD. Is that all? (*Going to Susan.*) Haven't

you heard the news, mother? Susan has promised to marry me. Isn't she a darling!

MRS. GUILDFORD. My dear Ripley, I have heard with great regret your singular behavior, but it is not a matter suitable for discussion at the moment and in the circumstances. You will kindly get your hat and coat and drive me home. Jackson can follow in your car.

GUILDFORD. But, mother——

MRS. GUILDFORD. Not another word, if you please.

GUILDFORD (*turning appealingly*). Mr. Corbett——!

BLINN. I entirely agree with your dear mother—I'll get your hat and coat.

MRS. CORBETT. Blinn!

SUSAN. Nunkie!

MRS. CORBETT. And after drinking their health and making that beautiful speech!

BLINN (*turning at door C.*). Understand me—entirely. (*Exit Blinn, C.*)

GUILDFORD (*turning to Susan*). You see, darling, they're against us—but if all the world——

MRS. CORBETT. I'm not against you, Ripley, and I don't agree with your mother about this or anything else. (*She is C. right, up against wall—obviously avoiding the neighborhood of Mrs. Guildford.*)

GUILDFORD. Thank you, Mrs. Corbett. As for you, mother——

MRS. GUILDFORD. If you must talk, Ripley, you will please select some other subject. (*She remains R., near fireplace.*)

GUILDFORD. I can't be hushed down now, mother, and I won't. (*Aside to Susan.*) Hold my hand, darling, it helps me. (*They hold hands.*) It must never be forgotten again that I'm thoroughly grown up. To-day, new responsibilities have come into my life, and I mean to act up to them.

MRS. CORBETT (*to herself*). The dear boy!

GUILDFORD. Of course you've been ripping to me in many ways, mother, and I'm very grateful—but I've been

a little slack and allowed you too much liberty;—I mean that, in a way I've allowed you to think too much for me, and although you're perfectly splendid and all that, in future I mean to think more for myself. (*He turns to Susan.*) Underneath it all mother's a good sort—topping—so you mustn't be frightened of her. I'm not.

SUSAN (*proudly*). Nor am I—not in the least.

MRS. GUILDFORD. My poor boy, you're making yourself supremely ridiculous, and everybody else very self-conscious.

GUILDFORD (*serenely*). I don't agree with you, mother dear. (*Susan, who is feeling very uncomfortable, makes a slight effort to release her hand.*) (*Aside to Susan.*) Don't let go. (*Then to Mrs. Guildford.*) I'm only leading up to this, that Susan and I are engaged to be married and nothing in the world can alter it.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*icily*). I presume you've told the young lady of your previous engagements.

GUILDFORD (*shocked, and for a moment disconcerted*). Mother!

MRS. GUILDFORD. Wouldn't it have been fairer to Miss—Miss——

MRS. CORBETT (*firmly*). Blaine.

MRS. GUILDFORD. Thank you—to Miss Blaine.

GUILDFORD. I—I haven't yet had time. I've not yet finished telling her how much I love her—have I, Susan?

SUSAN. No.

GUILDFORD. I've acknowledged, though, that I have a past—haven't I, Susan?

SUSAN. Yes.

MRS. GUILDFORD. It was your obvious duty to have told her that you were sent to Dinard because you engaged yourself to a curiously undesirable person whom you met at a London supper club.

GUILDFORD. Thank you, mother—you're—you're a great help. (*Susan struggles to release her hand. Aside to her.*) Don't let go now, darling—this is a crisis in our lives.

Enter Blinn quietly with Guildford's hat and coat. He remains up stage with Mrs. Corbett.

MRS. GUILDFORD. And that some time after your Dinard visit you again became engaged——

SUSAN (*shocked*). Again!

MRS. GUILDFORD. On that occasion to a young person in a sweetstuff shop—Emily Wells.

SUSAN (*wresting her hand away from Guildford*). After Dinard! After Dinard! (*She backs away from Guildford.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*much worked up*). I think it perfectly shameful that you should drag up that poor boy's foolish past. If I had a boy of my own——

BLINN (*quietly, laying his hand on her shoulder*). Georgie darling——

MRS. GUILDFORD. Needless to say, on both occasions I had to come to the rescue. It was not very pleasant, particularly in the case of Emily Wells.

GUILDFORD (*turning to Susan*). Susan—Susan dear—I know I've been a rotter in the past—but I swear to you——

SUSAN. I don't want to listen to you—I don't want to see you again.

MRS. CORBETT. Susan! (*She comes a step down.*)

GUILDFORD. You can't mean that, Susan. You told me you loved me—in this room—not half an hour ago—and again in the garden.

SUSAN. It wasn't true—I didn't love you and I don't love you. I think you're perfectly horrid, and I hate you. I only said "Yes" when you asked me because I thought you would be a good match for me. But now that I know more about you, and that I'm only the third on your list and now—(*with a blazing look at Mrs. Guildford*)—that I've met your—your family—I dislike and despise everything connected with you, and—and—(*only just managing to keep control of her emotion*)—it's all over between us. (*Sits in chair at writing-table.*)

GUILDFORD (*dazed*). Susan—Susan—Mrs. Corbett!

MRS. CORBETT (*dabbing her eyes*). I think it perfectly monstrous the way every one treats that poor dear boy.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*ready to go, coming C.*). Now, Ripley, if you please. It's quite unnecessary to prolong this extremely painful situation.

BLINN (*coming to Guildford, who stands, quite overcome, C.*). Here's your coat, little man. You must run along with your mother.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*moving towards French window*). May we go by the garden? (*Guildford crosses R.*)

BLINN. Certainly—certainly. (*He goes before her to French window.*) It's a glorious night—you'll have a beautiful drive home. (*He stands aside at the windows to let her pass.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD (*to Mrs. Corbett*). Good night. (*Then towards Susan.*) Good night. I apologize for my tiresome boy. (*Mrs. Corbett bows slightly. Susan takes no notice. Exit Mrs. Guildford.*)

BLINN (*guiding Mrs. Guildford with much solicitude*). There's only one step. That's right. (*Exit after Mrs. Guildford.*)

GUILDFORD (*crossing to R. end of sofa*). Susan—whatever you may say I—I'd give my life for you.

SUSAN (*angrily and brokenly*). Did you say that to Emily Wells?

GUILDFORD (*violently*). You're a heartless and wicked girl! You're as bad as mother, and I've done with you both. (*Turns to Mrs. Corbett.*) Good night, dear Mrs. Corbett. You've been a brick and you're my only friend.

MRS. CORBETT. Good night, you poor dear maligned boy. (*She shakes his hand, then wipes her eyes.*)

GUILDFORD. I'll never forget you. (*Then he glares at Susan's back.*) There are others whom I shall forget as soon as I possibly can. (*This very fiercely—he jams his hat on. Exit Guildford quickly. Susan drops into L. corner of sofa, and buries her face in her hands. Mrs. Corbett follows Guildford to French window.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*walking stage and agitated and indignant*). That poor boy—that poor dear boy, between you you've broken his heart. (*She comes to chair L. of table.*) I don't understand any of you—my head is in a whirl—but as for that woman, if I could have my way, she should be boiled in oil. Oh, Susan, how could you? You know whatever any one may say, I brought you up on the best principles, and always to tell the truth. I'll never forgive you. (*During this speech she gets below table R. Susan sobs audibly. Mrs. Corbett rushes to her.*) Susan—Susan darling. (*She sits on sofa beside Susan, and throws her arms around her.*) What is it? What's the matter, my precious? I didn't mean to be horrid. (*Kissing Susan's head.*) I'd rather cut my tongue out than say one unkind word. Come closer—put your head there. (*Meaning her breast.*) You poor baby! You know I love you—more than any one in the world—except Blinn. Of course I love him before everything—although I'm so careful not to let him see it. Oh, Susan darling, if only you knew what it is to love!

SUSAN. I—I do!

MRS. CORBETT (*delighted*). Susan—you do? Ripley! Then why——?

SUSAN (*breaking in*). I—I lied about it. First I said I did when I didn't; and then I said I didn't when I did. That—that was after I had been in the garden with him, and—and particularly after his beastly mother came between us—and told me about that horrible Emily Wells.

MRS. CORBETT. But you love him—that's everything—that's wonderful! (*Enter Blinn by French window, unnoticed, comes C., close to table.*) There is nothing in all the world so beautiful as——

BLINN. What's this—what's all this?

MRS. CORBETT. She loves him, Blinn—notwithstanding everything.

SUSAN (*tearfully and vehemently*). I don't love him.

I hate him. If I had known love was like this I'd never have had anything to do with it.

BLINN. Of course she loves him! Hasn't she lost him? (*He smiles broadly.*)

MRS. CORBETT. I think you're too cynical and unkind for words. (*Blinn continues to smile.*)

SUSAN (*tearfully*). I forgive you, Nunkie, because perhaps you meant well—but if you had seen his poor little face, all pinched and white about the nose——

BLINN. Thank God I didn't. (*Mrs. Corbett and Susan talk to each other in agitated whispers during the following.*) Meanwhile we are face to face with another crisis. (*He walks stage.*) It is one, however, with which I have already successfully grappled. I must tell you that after seeing our guests off in their speedy and expensive motor-cars, I permitted myself a meditative stroll to the alleged croquet lawn, and back, during which I wrestled with the difficulties which beset us to my entire satisfaction. You, Georgie, will take in one or two lodgers. As a concession to your ruffled dignity, you may describe them as "Paying guests." You, Susan, will seek immediate employment in a Government office. In these momentous days everybody must do something. The good times are over—perhaps never to return. Curiously enough, I heard that remark made by three different men in the Bodega only last Tuesday—the good times are over. (*Pause. He sees the women are whispering together. He shouts.*) I said—"The good times are over." (*During speech Blinn comes below table, C. The women start.*)

MRS. CORBETT. What good times, dear?

BLINN. I don't believe you've heard one single word I said. It's perfectly scandalous that while I pour out my store of wisdom and experience, you and Susan——

Enter Hogg, L.

HOGG. I beg pardon, sir? Did you call? (*He comes C.*)

BLINN. No—yes. What you really want to know is, if you may go to bed.

HOGG (*confused*). Oh, no—really sir——

BLINN. Well, you may.

HOGG. Thank you, sir. Anything more, sir!

BLINN. Yes—you will call me at seven.

HOGG. Yes—sir.

BLINN. I must catch the 8:15 train to London.

HOGG. Yes, sir.

BLINN. So must you.

HOGG (*a little uneasily*). Yes, sir.

BLINN. I am going to enlist. (*Mrs. Corbett and Susan clutch each other quickly, but gently.*)

HOGG (*with the manner of one who sees what is coming*). Yes, sir.

BLINN. So are you.

HOGG (*steadying himself*). Yes, sir. (*Slight pause—Blinn crosses to writing-table, switches on reading-lamp and sits.*) Anything else, sir?

BLINN (*quietly*). Yes, you can put out those lights. (*Hogg goes to door C. and switches off room light. He then closes French windows, but does not draw curtains. The moonlight is streaming through.*)

HOGG (*returning L.*). Good night, sir.

BLINN. Good night, Hogg.

HOGG. Good night, ma'am.

MRS. CORBETT (*softly*). Good night, Hogg.

HOGG. Good night, Miss Susan.

SUSAN (*gently*). Good night, Hogg. (*Exit Hogg, L. Blinn works at his desk, looking through and arranging papers. Slight pause. Then Susan rises, comes down very quietly and kisses the top of Blinn's head. He puts his hand up and touches her cheek, but doesn't turn. Susan goes up, opens door C., and waits for Mrs. Corbett, who also kisses the top of Blinn's head and is similarly touched by him on the cheek. Blinn continues to work. Mrs. Corbett goes up and whispers to Susan, and then takes her in her arms and kisses her. They are in*

the light of the hall. Exit Susan softly. She closes the door after her. Mrs. Corbett sits in the arm-chair R., out of Blinn's sight. She makes herself very small, as it were, and crosses her hands on her lap. There is a pause.)

BLINN (*without turning, and speaking in a tone of gentle raillery*). You needn't be frightened to breathe, I know you're there.

Mrs. CORBETT (*softly*). I know you do. (*A slight pause.*)

Slow Curtain.

END OF ACT II.

ACT III

SCENE.—*Same as Acts I and II. It is the following afternoon.*

Mrs. Corbett is discovered at the writing-table. She has written on two large cards. After a pause she places the cards upright on a table in view of audience and retires from them to get the effect. On one is written "Board and Lodging," and on the other "Paying Guests Received."

Enter Parsons by center door. She goes towards pantry door, sees Mrs. Corbett, comes down R. of table.

PARSONS. May I speak to you, ma'am?

MRS. CORBETT (*abstractedly*). Certainly, Parsons. What is it?

PARSONS (*whose face expresses mingled regret and determination*). I'm very sorry, ma'am; but the time has come when I have to make a change. (*She speaks quickly, but with embarrassment. Mrs. Corbett is rather preoccupied.*) It isn't that I have any complaints to make, although no one knows better than you, ma'am, that I was engaged as lady's maid, and not as cook-general. It's a matter of principle, ma'am. I'm twenty-nine now, and I have my career to think of, and— (*Noticing that Mrs. Corbett is not very attentive, she follows her eyes and sees the cards.*) Good gracious! (*Her startled gaze wanders from the cards to Mrs. Corbett. During this speech Parsons gets below table into position to read the cards on table.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*quietly*). What's the matter, Parsons?

PARSONS (*in awed tones*). Then, it's come to that?

MRS. CORBETT (*gently*). Times are rather bad, Parsons. (*Mrs. Corbett picks up "Paying Guest" card from table and takes a step back from table.*)

PARSONS. But—but—a lady like you!

MRS. CORBETT. Better ladies than I have had to do harder things. Which of those cards looks best, do you think?

PARSONS (*hotly*). I don't like either of them.

MRS. CORBETT. Neither do I; although I think this one is rather well written, "Paying Guests Received." (*She indicates the one with "Paying Guests Received" on it.*) The "P" and "G" are quite good, aren't they? Do say they are!

PARSONS. Oh, yes, ma'am, they're beautifully written.

MRS. CORBETT. I'm so glad you think so. Well, now, about the wording. My husband said I might use the expression "Paying Guests" (*Mrs Corbett sits L. of table, replacing card on table*), although whether he was pulling my— (*she corrects herself*)—whether he was making fun or not I have no idea. In a way, "Paying Guests" sounds better than "Board and Lodging," and yet somehow it seems like shirking, doesn't it? How does it strike you, Parsons?

PARSONS. It's certainly more ladylike, ma'am.

MRS. CORBETT. Ah, well, that of course decides it. (*She puts "Paying Guests" card in the waste-paper basket.*) I should hate to be ladylike, and I know my husband would disapprove. What was it you were telling me, Parsons? Something about your age? (*Coming back from writing-table to L.C.*)

PARSONS (*embarrassed*). I was trying to explain, ma'am, that—that I feel that I ought to make a change.

MRS. CORBETT. What change?

PARSONS. Find another place.

MRS. CORBETT. Oh! you want to leave us?

PARSONS. No, ma'am. Please don't put it like that; because I like being with you and I'm really devoted to the family. But you'll forgive me saying, ma'am, that it's not much of a career for a lady's maid with my experience and my references. And it isn't as if—But there—I can't say it! (*Going down R.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*sitting*). You can say anything to me, Parsons. (*Sitting on chair L. of table.*)

PARSONS. Well, it isn't as if there was any signs of things improving. Unfortunately they're not; and nobody is sorrier than I am.

MRS. CORBETT. No, I don't think things will improve just at present. As my husband says, the good times are over, and it wouldn't be fair to expect you to stay on; although perhaps, if you had a nice rest at the seaside—say a fortnight——

PARSONS (*a little grimly*). On what, ma'am?

MRS. CORBETT (*innocently*). On a holiday, (*She catches the expression on Parsons' face, and looks embarrassed and pained.*) Oh, I see! (*Rising.*) I see! Of course! How stupid of me to forget. There's money owing to you, Parsons and——

PARSONS (*interrupting*). I wasn't thinking of anything unpleasant, ma'am. I assure you I wasn't.

MRS. CORBETT. I'm sure you weren't. I quite understand. You musn't think Mr. Corbett is the least to blame, Parsons. He had expectations that can't be realized—particularly now^a that the war is come. I am entirely to blame—for everything. I don't wish to explain, but I want you to understand that my husband is an unusually noble character.

PARSONS. I'm sure of it, ma'am.

MRS. CORBETT. Now about your wages. I'm afraid there's no money in the house, but I think I can manage. I still have the bracelet my grandmother gave me on my first marriage. My husband refuses to have anything to do with it, although it's quite a good one, and ought to realize forty pounds. (*She goes towards door C. Parsons goes up to her.*)

PARSONS. Excuse me, ma'am.

MRS. CORBETT. What's the matter?

PARSONS. I couldn't let you, ma'am—I really couldn't. Nothing would induce me. I may have my faults, but I'd scorn to be sordid.

MRS. CORBETT (*gently*). But I insist, Parsons, It's only right and honest.

PARSONS (*firmly*). You'll forgive me, Mrs. Corbett, but a lady's maid has her pride, even when she's cook as well.

MRS. CORBETT (*resignedly, but with quiet dignity, as she moves away*). Then I shall arrange the affair myself. (*Coming down and sitting on sofa.*)

PARSONS. It isn't necessary, ma'am—truly it isn't. I have money in the savings bank. I am quite content to wait for what's due to me until better times; and I'm sure I can say the same for Mr. Hogg.

MRS. CORBETT (*surprised*). Hogg?

PARSONS. Yes, ma'am. Perhaps I oughtn't to mention it; but we agreed to take the same course—simultaneous. It's not dissatisfaction, ma'am. It's just cold sense. And although he's devoted to Mr. Corbett—

MRS. CORBETT. But Hogg has gone to London—to enlist. (*Parsons is petrified. Her face turns ashen. Mrs. Corbett notices how shocked Parsons is, and lowers her voice sympathetically.*) Didn't he tell you?

PARSONS (*without moving*). No, ma'am.

MRS. CORBETT. Men don't like to talk of such things to us women.

PARSONS (*her face breaking up*). That great baby—a soldier! (*Suddenly she covers her face with her hands, and goes up C., then stops opposite windows, remaining up C., her back to Mrs. Corbett. Mrs. Corbett's face shows that she is much moved. She glances at Parsons. Slight pause. Then she sighs and takes up the card "Board and Lodging," and, after a little consideration, fastens it on the window R., so that it may be seen from without. As Mrs. Corbett turns, Parsons, who has wiped her eyes, turns, and she wears a determined and stoical expression.*) Excuse me, ma'am, but I'd like to take back what I said about going away. I'd rather stay on, ma'am, if you don't mind.

MRS. CORBETT. Of course I should be delighted—but——

PARSONS. I'm sure William would wish it. When he comes back from the war—if he ever comes back—he'll come to Mr. Corbett.

MRS. CORBETT. But, Parsons— (*Her voice falters a little.*) My husband may never come back.

PARSONS (*looking at her*). Well, I—I suppose that's possible, too, ma'am.

MRS. CORBETT. Quite possible.

PARSONS (*with decision*). All the more reason we should stick it out together. So that's settled.

MRS. CORBETT. Thank you, Parsons. (*Exit Parsons by door L. Mrs. Corbett sits at center table on chair L.*)
Enter Susan by C. door.

MRS. CORBETT. Well, darling, what have you done?

SUSAN. Everything. I've arranged the rooms for the lodgers—the spare room and Nunkie's—and I've aired the sheets, and put flowers on the dressing-table. (*She takes off her large garden hat, puts it on side table by window R., and tidies her hair before the mirror.*) And I've written to the Admiralty and the Censor applying for a clerkship. I'm sure to get one because I didn't forget to say that my grandfather was a vicar. (*She sees the card in the window.*) Oh, you've got a card up already? (*She goes to window and examines it.*) Isn't it splendid? "Board and Lodging." So simple and dignified! Just like you, Auntie dear! (*Kisses her. Coming L. of Mrs. Corbett.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Thank you, darling! I'm glad you like it.

SUSAN. Well, when I went to post my letters I thought I'd better call on the tradespeople and cheer them up a bit by telling them about the lodgers, and the Government appointment I'm going to have. You've no idea of the success I had. I scattered smiles wherever I went, and I'm sure not a soul in the village could dream how sore my heart is. (*Going L., below sofa.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Because of that dear Ripley?

SUSAN (*suddenly and scornfully*). Ripley! Ripley! Oh, I suppose you mean that Guildford youth! Don't remind me of *him*, please. For me, he simply doesn't exist. (*She sits on L. end of sofa.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*gently*). Susie! Susie!

SUSAN. It's perfectly true. In the middle of the night I tore him out of my heart, just as I once pulled an aching tooth out with a piece of string.

MRS. CORBETT (*innocently*). You foolish child! You should have gone to a dentist. (*Susan laughs heartily.*) What are you laughing at?

SUSAN. I'm laughing because—because you say such funny things, and you're such a darling! (*She becomes serious.*) No, Auntie dear, the person you mention doesn't count in the slightest. He's done for himself for ever, and his Amelia Scruggins—or whatever her beastly name is—is welcome to him.

MRS. CORBETT (*brightly*). I remember her name. It's Emily Wells.

SUSAN (*breaking in, almost violently*). Stop, auntie! Can't you see I don't want to remember her name—or his, either! Why, I—I shouldn't know him if he came into the room at this moment.

MRS. CORBETT. But, darling, you acknowledged that your heart is sore. (*She sits on sofa by Susan.*)

SUSAN. It's sore for the same reason that yours is, Auntie. Sore about Nunkie.

MRS. CORBETT (*gently agitated*). My dear! What can I do? He asked me not to worry, and I've been trying not to. But I'm distracted. You know he'll go to the front if he has to burrow a tunnel to get there. He laughed at my fears—told me he'd be a General in a year. But think of Blinn, at his age, in the trenches. . . . And the winter will be here presently. I begged him to call at the War Office and see General Faber himself.

SUSAN (*who is very thoughtful*). Well?

MRS. CORBETT. He said—the words are not mine—he

said he'd see the old buck damned first! Not very respectful, was it? Besides, the General is not an old buck. He's a very sensible and sympathetic person.

SUSAN. Any one can see, Auntie dear, that he was very fond of you!

MRS. CORBETT. Fond of me! Certainly not—not in that way. (*Is very embarrassed.*)

SUSAN. Why, Auntie, you're blushing! (*She is secretly amused.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*vehemently*). I'm doing nothing of the sort. Blushing indeed! An old married woman like me. What an idea!

SUSAN. Of course he loved you. What man wouldn't? You darling!

MRS. CORBETT. The General never had any such thought. He is a very high-minded man.

SUSAN. But, Auntie, I've read that even the highest-minded men sometimes——

MRS. CORBETT (*interrupting with gentle vehemence*). I insist on explaining. Really you're sometimes as bad as Blinn. Please listen to me. (*She seizes Susan's arm and makes her turn to her.*)

SUSAN (*innocently*). Well, Auntie dear?

MRS. CORBETT. Well—well, the Colonel had a habit of nagging and bullying me before other people—the most vulgar thing to my mind that a man can do.

SUSAN. Or a woman, either.

MRS. CORBETT. Or a woman, either. I quite agree. Well, it occurred several times when the General was present, and on each occasion he managed to convey to me that his sympathies were entirely with me.

SUSAN (*quietly*). How, Auntie?

MRS. CORBETT (*again rather confused*). Well—generally with his eyes. He had a stern mouth, but kind eyes—very kind eyes.

SUSAN. Any other ways?

MRS. CORBETT. Well, twice—or was it three times?—

at dinner or luncheon, when the Colonel was particularly rude, the General laid his hand on mine.

SUSAN (*with affected anxiety*). Not on the table before everybody, surely?

MRS. CORBETT (*quickly*). Certainly not! The General is a most discreet man.

SUSAN. Oh! Then it must have been—— (*She hesitates.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*rather blurting it out*). Under the table, naturally.

SUSAN (*very innocently*). Oh, yes. And of course he squeezed it.

MRS. CORBETT (*with much vexation, rising and going L.C.*). Nothing of the kind! What an extremely disagreeable thing to say! The General only pressed my hand gently—like a father. He used to call me his little friend. (*Susan rises and flings her arms round her.*) What's the matter?

SUSAN. I suppose if you knew what a darling you are, you wouldn't be quite such a darling as you are. (*She kisses and releases her.*) Auntie! The General is ours. We must set to work at once.

MRS. CORBETT. What do you mean?

SUSAN. I mean that the telegram Nunkie sent was a tactical error. You must wire the old boy himself, immediately.

MRS. CORBETT (*gently agitated*). Oh, Susie, I should love to! But I shouldn't dare. Blinn would be furious.

SUSAN. Nunkie need never know. It shall be our secret. (*She goes to writing-table and gets telegraph form.*) Come and write. (*Mrs. Corbett sits L. of table C.*) Here's a telegraph form. (*Hands her one.*)

MRS. CORBETT. What am I to say?

SUSAN. Something nice. (*Goes to door C. quickly.*) I'll get the money. (*Exit Susan.*) (*Mrs. Corbett finds a difficulty in writing. She is very thoughtful. She makes an effort; then after reading the result tears up the form and takes another. Suddenly the inspiration*

comes and she smiles with satisfaction. She writes quickly.)

Enter Susan. She is carrying a black and white stocking, from which, unseen by Mrs. Corbett, she takes a coin. She rolls up the stocking and puts it in her pocket.

SUSAN. Finished?

MRS. CORBETT (*writing*). Just! (*Hands Susan the telegram and anxiously watches the effect.*)

SUSAN (*reading*). "General Faber, War Office, London. Fighting Blinn enlisting as Private to-day. Confidential. Your unhappy little friend, Georgie Corbett." (*She looks at Mrs. Corbett with great admiration.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Well?

SUSAN. Perfect, Auntie, simply perfect! "Your unhappy little friend" is a stroke of genius. Now I'll get it into the post office. (*She picks up her hat from table in window R.*)

Enter Guildford by French window.

GUILDFORD (*rather timidly*). May—may I come in? (*Susan assumes a frozen look. Mrs. Corbett rises, takes a step to Ripley, then turns and goes to Susan.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Ripley! The dear boy! (*She turns quickly to Susan.*) Give me the telegram, dear. I'll send it myself. Lend me your hat. (*Susan holds the hat behind her.*)

SUSAN (*lowering her voice*). No, Auntie, I'll go. I'd much rather. (*Goes up R.C. followed by Mrs. Corbett, who goes C. between Susan and Ripley.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*lowering her voice*). Certainly not, darling. Don't be foolish. You must stay and talk to Ripley. (*Guildford meanwhile is standing by the French window, looking rather foolish.*)

SUSAN (*still retaining the hat*). But I don't want to talk to him; and I don't want to be left alone with him. Auntie, do be nice!

MRS. CORBETT. But, darling, he's come all the way to see you, and really— (*Taking telegram from Susan.*)

SUSAN. He's much more likely to have come to see you.

MRS. CORBETT (*turning and raising her voice*). You've called to see Susan, haven't you, Ripley?

GUILDFORD. I—(*very embarrassed*)—I don't know, Mrs. Corbett.

MRS. CORBETT. Well, I do.

SUSAN (*severely*). Mr. Guildford and I have nothing to say to each other.

MRS. CORBETT (*for her quite sharply*). Susan!

SUSAN. Yes, Auntie?

MRS. CORBETT (*with great dignity*). I would have you remember that I brought you up to behave properly on all occasions. The hat, please. (*Susan hands it to her.*) And the money for the telegram. (*Susan hands it to her and then drops down above chair R. of table. She then goes to door C., glances from Susan to Ripley, and says in her best manner.*) I hope you will excuse me for a few minutes, Ripley. (*Still very dignified, she again looks from Susan to Guildford.*) When I was a child we used to sing a little song. (*Susan moves with a touch of impatience to arm-chair by fire.*) Don't fidget, Susan, I'm not going to sing. The first line was "Kind words can never die." The other lines were the same. (*Exit Mrs. Corbett by door C.*)

SUSAN (*with frigid politeness*). Do sit down, Mr. Guildford. Auntie won't be long. (*She goes to writing-table, picking up block of telegraph forms from table C. on her way.*)

GUILDFORD (*insinuatingly, and with a view to propitiation*). Isn't she a little brick? (*Coming down to back of sofa.*)

SUSAN. My aunt has a beautiful nature, and I hope you won't mind my working. I have important letters to write. (*She affects great industry.*)

GUILDFORD. Oh, not at all! (*He sits on chair L. of table. There is a pause. He is very uncomfortable while she writes—or pretends to.*) It's a beautiful day!

SUSAN (*without looking up*). Beautiful!

GUILDFORD. Warm, for the autumn. (*Fans himself with his hat.*)

SUSAN (*writing.*) Very. (*Slight pause.*) If you find it close in here, perhaps you'd rather wait in the garden, Mr. Guildford.

GUILDFORD (*jumping up, suddenly furious*). Don't call me Mr. Guildford! Do you hear? I won't have it! If you call me Mr. Guildford again, I'll run through that door (*meaning the French window*) and I shan't stop running until I fall down.

SUSAN (*affecting to be very shocked*). Really, Mr.— Really!

GUILDFORD (*modifying his tone, but with determination.*) Yes, really! (*Slight pause.*)

SUSAN (*with a bright thought*). When Auntie comes back she'll give you a cup of tea. There's nothing so good for a headache as a cup of tea.

GUILDFORD (*with dignity*). I haven't got a headache. (*Guildford goes above table.*)

SUSAN (*quietly*). No?

GUILDFORD. No. (*Takes another step towards window R., then turns and finishes speech.*) I was never better in my life.

SUSAN (*indifferently, while continuing to write*). No?

GUILDFORD. No. (*Taking another step towards window R., he observes and goes up to and looks at the card in the window. He gets an idea, and smiles to himself.*) You look upon me as an intruder? (*Coming to back of chair L. of table.*)

SUSAN (*writing*). Not at all, Mr.— (*She pulls herself up.*) Not at all.

GUILDFORD. Anyway, you want me to think you do. But I'm not. As a matter of fact, I called in—in regard to the lodgings.

SUSAN (*with slight interest*). Oh, you could recommend somebody?

GUILDFORD. I want them for myself.

SUSAN (*a little startled*). For yourself? (*Slight pause.*) I—I don't think my aunt—

GUILDFORD (*breaking in complaisantly*). There'll be no difficulty—your aunt likes me. (*Crossing below sofa.*)

SUSAN. Aunt Georgie is very fond of children.

GUILDFORD (*with a momentary return of temper.*) I'm not a child. (*With a great effort he pulls himself up. Looking over her shoulder he sees what she is doing.*) Perhaps you could spare a moment from drawing caricatures of me to show me the rooms? (*Susan shocked and angry that he has discovered her, slips the paper under the blotting-pad, then goes to fireplace and touches electric bell. They both remain tense for a few moments.*)

Enter Parsons.

SUSAN. Parsons, will you please show Mr. Guildford the rooms?

PARSONS. Yes, miss. (*She opens door for Guildford. He hesitates for a moment and looks at Susan, who is looking away from him. Then he goes to door C. Exeunt Guildford and Parsons. Susan comes to writing-table, examines the drawing she has made, and laughs aloud. Suddenly she frowns, tears the pieces up very small and throws them into waste-paper basket. She affects to write letters.*)

Enter Guildford, comes down to back of sofa L.C.

GUILDFORD. The rooms are awfully jolly! Rippin'! Such taste, too! Fresh flowers and everything. That Parsons is top-hole. I've taken 'em both. One will do for a dressing-room.

SUSAN. My aunt will certainly not take you in opposition to your mother.

GUILDFORD (*promptly*). I've left mother—for the present at any rate. We're fond of each other and all that, but we don't think alike about many things. For instance, she wanted to stop me joining the Flying Corps?

SUSAN (*quickly and unguardedly*). And you have?

GUILDFORD (*glad to have her interest*). Rather! This morning! I've to report at Brooklands to-morrow. (*Susan has averted her face.*) Mother barred the Flying Corps. Said it was too dangerous for an only son. Wanted me to go into the regular army, but fancy crawling like a worm in the trenches when you can soar in the sky like an eagle. (*Susan covers her face with her hands, unnoticed at the time by Guildford.*) Mother thought she had me coerced on the money side, but she didn't reckon on my natural intelligence. Perhaps she didn't know about it. It never occurred to her that I might have saved a bit of late out of my allowance. (*Going below sofa.*) I'll tell you something in confidence. When's the war's over I'm going in for finance. (*He notices her attitude and goes towards her.*) Why, Susan, what's the matter?

SUSAN (*looking up at him*). Nothing — why? (*Rising.*)

GUILDFORD (*confused*). Only that I—I thought—I hoped——

SUSAN. That I was crying about you like the others?

GUILDFORD (*retreating and protesting*). Now, Susan!

SUSAN. Does it please you to make girls cry, Ripley Guildford?

GUILDFORD (*incensed*). Oh, damn!

SUSAN. Oh, if only I could help to make you a good man!

GUILDFORD (*eagerly*). So you can.

SUSAN. As your sister—an elder sister.

GUILDFORD (*disappointed*). That's silly rot. You're much younger than I am.

SUSAN (*solemnly*). Women are born ten years older than men. (*With quiet authority.*) Sit down, Ripley. There. (*She points to sofa. He sits R. end of sofa.*) Do you ever think of how wicked you have been Ripley? (*She affects great severity.*)

GUILDFORD (*dejectedly*). Yes.

SUSAN. And of the girls you have made unhappy?

GUILDFORD. Er—yes.

SUSAN. Of the hearts you have broken?

GUILDFORD. Oh, come, Susan——!

SUSAN (*sternly*). Do you? (*She sits on sofa.*)

GUILDFORD (*thinking it best to acquiesce*). Yes.

SUSAN. That girl you met at your London Club, for instance—do you ever think of her?

GUILDFORD (*meekly*). Yes. No, I'm damned if I do.

SUSAN. Oh, Ripley—are you quite heartless?

GUILDFORD (*defensively*). No, I'm not. Now look here, Susan——

SUSAN (*interrupting*). Or of that other young person—that poor little thing who sold chocolates, and probably had sandy hair. Esther something——

GUILDFORD (*promptly*). Oh, Emily Wells.

SUSAN (*passionately*). How dare you! I don't want to hear her name! Everybody knows it—even Auntie, and everybody seems to like to shout it!

GUILDFORD (*humbly*). I beg your pardon, Susan.

SUSAN (*most calmly*). If you're obliged to mention it, why can't you do it simply and quietly—Emily Wells—like that.

GUILDFORD. I'll try and remember. (*Slight pause.*)

SUSAN. Poor Emily was very fond of you, wasn't she?

GUILDFORD (*with a touch of impatience*). Oh, it was all just silly. (*Unseen she smiles on him.*)

SUSAN (*getting closer to him*). When you used to go out together—after the shop was closed—used she to smooth your hair like—like this? (*She illustrates on his hair.*)

GUILDFORD (*smiling*). I—I can't remember. I suppose so.

SUSAN. Or like this? (*She suddenly roughs his hair over his forehead, and then sits back in her old place.*)

GUILDFORD (*stretching his arms out*). Susan!

SUSAN (*raising her hand*). No! (*He sits back, dis-*

appointed.) If only you could realize how bad you are.

GUILDFORD (*sadly, but to humor her*). I do, Susan.

SUSAN. And repent?

GUILDFORD. I do.

SUSAN (*thoughtfully*). Repentance is no use without atonement, Ripley.

GUILDFORD. If you want me to atone, Susan, why, damn it, I will.

SUSAN (*gladly*). You mean it? You are sincere? (*He nods his head.*) Then I have a splendid idea. Ripley, you shall marry Emily.

GUILDFORD (*amazed*). But, Susan——!

SUSAN. Ssh! Don't interrupt! You shall marry Emily. I've set my heart on it, and, remember, I'm your elder sister. You owe it to her, Ripley, for you led her on. You acknowledged you allowed her to play with your hair. The truth is you compromised the poor girl, Ripley, and you must marry her. She's probably just as well educated as you are. I'm told those night schools are excellent institutions, and if her manners are a bit off you can teach her yours, or your mother might take her in hand. (*Rising and crossing C.*) As to her sandy hair, no doubt something might be arranged.

GUILDFORD (*protesting*). But she hasn't got sandy hair.

SUSAN (*losing enthusiasm*). Oh, hasn't she?

GUILDFORD. No—it's blond.

SUSAN (*with studied indifference*). No doubt you know best. I suppose when a girl strokes your hair, the proper answer is to——

GUILDFORD (*breaking in*). And, anyway, she's married.) (*Susan stops as one shot.*)

SUSAN (*in a low, tense voice*). Emily married?

GUILDFORD. Of course—six months ago.

SUSAN (*standing perfectly still, facing audience and smiling ecstatically*). Dear Emily!

GUILDFORD. She married a clerk.

SUSAN (*the same*). Dear clerk!

GUILDFORD. In the Co-Operative Stores!

SUSAN (*the same*). Dear Co-Operative Stores!

GUILDFORD (*rising and going towards her*). Why, Susan, I believe you're glad.

SUSAN. Yes, I'm glad. I took quite—quite an interest in the poor little thing. You're sure she's really married.

GUILDFORD. Rather! I ought to know; I sent her a wedding present. (*Pause. They look at each other.*)

SUSAN. Oh, Ripley!

GUILDFORD (*with a movement*). Susan!

SUSAN. You ought to have told me before about Emily—about dear Emily's marriage.

GUILDFORD. You didn't let me get a word in edgeways.

SUSAN. Because then I mightn't have been so unkind, for I really do love you, Ripley.

GUILDFORD (*trembling with love*). Susan! (*Slight movement to her.*)

SUSAN (*also trembling*). Oh, Ripley! (*She moves back from him. He goes towards her open-armed. She falls back farther.*) No, don't come near me. Don't you dare touch me! I'm frightened of you! You're so strong, and so brave, and you look so hungry, and you have such long arms! (*She suddenly turns, and runs through the French window. Exit Susan.*)

GUILDFORD. Susan! (*He runs after her. Exit Guildford.*)

Enter Parsons with tea-cloth and tray with tea-things, which she places on table C., then goes to small table in window R. and lays the cloth.

A moment later enter Hogg, pantry door. He comes in rather furtively, carrying his hat in his hand, stands C. above table. Parsons having laid the cloth, turns and sees Hogg.

HOGG (*thinking he's in for a scolding*). Now, Parsons!

PARSONS. Now, William! (*They stand looking at each*

other. Then she says with studied moderation.) I hope you enjoyed yourself in London.

HOGG. Very much, thank you.

PARSONS. Where's Mr. Corbett?

HOGG. He's coming. I saw him at the station. (*Slight pause. He clears his throat.*) Parsons, I——

PARSONS (*moving to him*). Explanations are unnecessary, William. I know, and you know I know. (*Coming right up to him C. above table.*)

HOGG. Yes, I see you do, and if you're the woman I take you for, you don't disapprove.

PARSONS. I don't. I—I expected it.

HOGG. Thank you, Parsons.

PARSONS. I think you might remember to-day of all days to call me Ada.

HOGG. Sorry, Ada.

PARSONS. And if you feel like it you may kiss me. (*He does so.*)

HOGG (*holding her away and looking at her fondly*). By George, Ada, I'll say this for you—you're a sport. (*She gives him an eloquent look and he corrects himself.*) You're a game one, and I'm proud of you.

PARSONS. What has to be has got to be. (*Going to table C., picking up tea-tray and taking it to small table R.*)

HOGG. That's right—and mind, you mustn't blame the Gov'nor. He certainly put it up to me, but I had my convictions already. (*Loftily.*) A man has got to act up to his convictions.

PARSONS. They passed you all right?

HOGG (*with vanity and spreading his chest*). Did they pass me? Why, when I was coming away a chap as big as a house—sergeant or something—slapped me on the back and said, "You're the sort we want!"

PARSONS (*dryly*). He would!

HOGG. Ada, when I come back—— (*He hesitates slightly; she looks at him.*)

PARSONS (*steadily*). Yes—when you come back.
(*Coming back to Hogg.*)

HOGG (*with a touch of swagger*). When we've polished off this little affair—

PARSONS (*spreading the table-cloth*). When will that be, William?

HOGG (*instinctively putting down his hat and helping her*). Oh, in three or four months—six at most.

PARSONS. Well, what then?

HOGG. You and I will slip quietly into a church one day and get married.

PARSONS. Why wait so long, William?

HOGG (*pausing to scratch his head*). Well, now, that's an idea!

PARSONS. I'm full of ideas.

HOGG. You're a wonder.

PARSONS. Don't soldiers' wives get allowances? I've heard rumors.

HOGG. By George, Ada, you think of everything. You'll make me a grand little wife.

PARSONS. I'll try, William. (*She takes his hat and exits, L. Hogg arranges things on the tea-table.*)

Enter Blinn by French windows.

BLINN. Oh, you're here? (*Coming C. close table.*)

HOGG (*straightening himself*). Yes, sir. (*Turning from tea-table.*)

BLINN. Well?

HOGG. It was all right, sir.

BLINN. What was all right?

HOGG. They passed me, sir.

BLINN (*who is in a rather bitter humor*). Oh, they did, did they?

HOGG (*very pleased with himself*). Yes, sir—it was quite easy—like shelling peas.

BLINN (*dryly*). Really? (*Slight pause.*) What are you round the chest?

HOGG. Trifle over thirty-seven, sir.

BLINN. Have you ever fired a gun in anger?

HOGG. No, sir.

BLINN. Or even in the way of kindness?

HOGG. Not yet, sir.

BLINN. Well, no doubt you'll make an excellent soldier. (*Goes down L. below settee.*)

HOGG. I'll do my best, sir.

BLINN. I'm sure of that, Hogg.

HOGG (*with a touch of vanity*). There was a great big chap—color-sergeant or something—slapped me on the back and said, "You're the sort we want!"

BLINN. Splendid! You had a regular send-off.

HOGG. A little boy in the crowd outside wished me good luck.

BLINN. That must have been the boy who shouted after me, "Bravo, old 'un!"

HOGG (*rather shocked*). "Old 'un"? Cheek!

BLINN. And it was probably your alleged color-sergeant—he was a large, powerful person—who slapped me on the back and said, "Pity it hadn't been fifteen years ago."

HOGG. Slapped you on the back——?

BLINN. Heartily!

HOGG. I call it a liberty.

BLINN. Not at all, Hogg—we're all democrats now. It was only an assault. Give me a whisky and soda, please. (*He goes L.*)

HOGG (*goes to sideboard*). But do you mean, sir, they've actually——

BLINN. Turned me down, yes.

HOGG. Good God!

BLINN. Not too much soda. (*Then with a sudden burst of passion.*) Turned me down! Me! Damn them! Me! An old fighter! a kind of butcher. (*He goes to Hogg.*) See that chest! Forty-four inches! (*Receives glass of whisky and soda from Hogg. He takes the stage.*) Turned down just because I'm a paltry ten years older than you! If they don't want a chest like that, what the hell do they want? (*Comes down R. to fireplace.*)

Enter Mrs. Corbett by French window. She is wearing Susan's big garden hat. Blinn turns at the moment and faces her. His anger drops off like a cloak, and he smiles.

BLINN. Hallo!

MRS. CORBETT (*smiling*). Hallo! (*At back of sofa.*)

BLINN. Hogg got through all right.

MRS. CORBETT. I should think so.

BLINN (*rallying Hogg*). What was it the man said to you, Hogg—the big man.

HOGG (*embarrassed, but grinning*). Quarter-master or something, ma'am. He said, "You're the sort we want!"

MRS. CORBETT. I'm sure you are, Hogg. (*Crossing to mirror.*)

BLINN. Well, now you *know* you're all right.

HOGG. Thank you, sir. (*Exit Hogg.*)

BLINN. Where did you get that hat? (*At sideboard, having put down his tumbler.*)

MRS. CORBETT. It's Susan's.

BLINN. Take it off.

MRS. CORBETT (*coquettishly*). Why should I. (*She glances in the mirror.*) I think it suits me.

BLINN. I want to see your face.

MRS. CORBETT. Oh, I didn't know—— (*Crosses to below sofa.*)

BLINN. What do you suppose I ran away with you for?

MRS. CORBETT. There. (*She takes off and puts hat on back of sofa R. end, sits on the sofa L. end.*)

BLINN (*remains standing*). I want you to be frank with me, Georgie. I don't want to be chaffed, or made fun of, or laughed at—— (*Coming down to back of R. end of sofa.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Oh, Blinn, you know very well it's you who always——

BLINN (*breaking in*). I've been laughed at already, to-day.

MRS. CORBETT (*indignantly*). Who would dare to?

BLINN. I want the simple truth! What do you think of me?

MRS. CORBETT. Of course I think you're the most splendid man in——

BLINN (*breaking in*). Yes, I know—but criticize me—damn it, criticize me—in detail. (*Crossing C.*)

MRS. CORBETT. I—I simply can't.

BLINN. Am I old? (*Coming back to R. end of sofa.*)

MRS. CORBETT. No—certainly not. Of course you're not so young as you were——

BLINN. Well, who is?—tell me that. (*Taking stage again.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Well, no one—naturally.

BLINN. Am I fat? (*Coming back to same position.*)

MRS. CORBETT. N-no. You're just right. I hate skinny men—so bad-tempered. The Colonel was skinny.

BLINN. Then you think I'm all right?

MRS. CORBETT (*reassuringly*). Perfectly all right, dear. (*He sits dejectedly beside her—she looks at him, then lays a hand timidly and sympathetically on his shoulder.*) What's the matter, old man?

BLINN. They've turned me down.

MRS. CORBETT. Turned you down? They must be mad!

BLINN. Thank you, Georgie. . . . Too old for the trenches.

MRS. CORBETT (*within her mind the telegram she has sent*). They'll come to their senses, you'll see. It's only because everything's so muddled. (*Their eyes meet—hers are brimming over with love and sympathy.*)

BLINN. I know what you'd like. You'd like me to put my face in your lap and cry, just a little, so that you might make a fuss of me and console me. (*She nods her head.*) And perhaps I'd like it too; but you know I can't do it because you know it's not my way. (*She shakes her head, unable to speak.*) That wouldn't be me, but another man, and you don't want another man, do you?

MRS. CORBETT (*vehemently and with emotion*). Good God, no!

BLINN. But what perhaps you don't know is that I'd rather have that look in your eyes than anything else in the whole world. (*He kisses her and rises, goes C. He raises his voice cheerfully.*) As for the war, I'm not done yet—not by any means. (*Suddenly he stops, his face lights up, and he swings round.*) Georgie, Georgie! I have the idea. You inspired me—you always do. (*He shouts excitedly.*) Hogg! Hogg! (*He hurries to the fireplace and touches the bell-push.*)

MRS. CORBETT. What are you going to do?

BLINN. I'm going to join the Foreign Legion.

MRS. CORBETT. But, darling, I've heard they're terrible people. (*She secretly wipes her eyes.*)

BLINN. And I'm a terrible man. Bloody Blinn the chaps called me in Africa.

MRS. CORBETT. I thought it was Fighting Blinn?

BLINN. That was only the civilians.

Enter Hogg by door L.

HOGG. Yes, sir?

BLINN. I want you to pack my kit-bag.

HOGG. Yes, sir. (*Hogg exits L. Blinn continues to talk without waiting for Hogg's exit.*)

BLINN (*coming R. of sofa and speaking rapidly*). And now there's the money question. The only real trouble in this otherwise glorious existence is the money question. Well, again I've solved it. Have I ever failed? But this time you'll be grieved, for I've sold a cherished possession.

MRS. CORBETT. Oh, Blinn!

BLINN. You've guessed it. I knew you would. I've sold the portrait of my dear old father. (*Mrs Corbett appears about to speak.*) "Oh, but," you say, "the old buck was already up the spout," to which I reply, "Too true, but I chanced on a man, a certain maker of munitions, who, naturally has money, but, unnaturally, no ancestor." (*Mrs. Corbett smiles.*) Well, observe me carefully shepherding the M.M. to the little house of

financial accommodation off Regent Street, and mark the M.M. standing open-mouthed and craven under the hostile stare of the old 'un!

MRS. CORBETT (*pleased*). Well?

BLINN. Well, the negotiations opened by our munitional comrade offering me five pounds for the ticket. I think it was less my dear old dad's face than his hunting-jacket that attracted him.

MRS. CORBETT. Five pounds isn't much, but still——

BLINN (*breaking in*). I, too, thought it rather conservative, so I promptly sprang a hundred on him.

MRS. CORBETT (*disappointed*). Oh, then, of course, he refused.

BLINN (*breaking in*). Patience, my love! To cut short the story of one of the most interesting deals in which I've ever taken part, we closed at forty-five. (*Moving C.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*clapping her hands*). Forty-five! Forty-five! (*Rising and going to him.*)

BLINN. Forty-five golden—— (*He puts his hand to the wrong watch-pocket and his face falls. He then successfully tries the other watch-pocket and smiles as he withdraws a roll of notes.*) Forty-five paper sovereigns! "Ah, but," you say, "where do I come in?" (*He goes to writing-table.*) To which I reply by placing thirty pounds for housekeeping purposes and a new hat into this drawer (*action as indicated*), the balance I thrust with a fine carelessness into the right-hand pocket of my trousers—it will serve to get me to Paris, with incidentals——

MRS. CORBETT (*who has fallen into a thoughtful mood. She is a little down stage, while he is still at the writing-table.*) Of course I'm glad—but doesn't it seem—a little—unfilial?

BLINN. Courage little one! (*He goes to her and passes his arm round her.*) The picture is an indifferent copy of the original which scowls over the mantelpiece in my eldest brother's dining-room. (*She looks up at him with a relieved and sunny smile.*)

Enter Parsons by door C.

PARSONS. Mrs. Guildford has called, ma'am.

BLINN. Mrs. Guildford! How kind! (*Mrs. Corbett makes for the French window.*) Where are you going?

MRS. CORBETT. Out! I really couldn't see her—not after last night.

BLINN (*giving her Susan's big hat*). Better have your hat, darling. It may rain. (*Mrs. Corbett takes the hat and exits quickly. Blinn nods to Parsons.*) Yes, in here. (*Exit Parsons. Blinn takes a position below settee. The door is opened by Parsons from without.*)

Enter Parsons. She stands aside for Mrs. Guildford.

Enter Mrs. Guildford. Exit Parsons, closing the door.

BLINN (*courteously*). Good afternoon. (*Blinn goes C. above table to meet her.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD. Good afternoon. (*They both hesitate about a handshake—and there is a moment's confusion. Then Blinn offers his hand very frankly.*)

BLINN. It was kind of you to call.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*looking him in the face while taking his hand*). Not at all. I called about my own affairs. It's best to be frank, isn't it?

BLINN. Always. Frankness with me is a passion. Do sit down. (*Pointing to chair R. of table.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD (*coming down R.C.*). No, thank you. I shan't take up more than a moment of your time, and I'd rather stand. (*Slight pause.*) Mr. Corbett, my son has joined the Flying Corps.

BLINN. I congratulate you. He's a fine lad. (*Standing by chair L. of table.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD. He did so against my wishes. I was prepared for his joining the Army—I expected it—even wished it. But—but—the Flying Corps is the most dangerous of the services, and Ripley is an only child.

BLINN (*gently*). Yes, I know.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*with a touch of emotion*). I—I love my boy.

BLINN. I have never doubted that you're human.

MRS. GUILDFORD. Others have—perhaps he has. I'm not very demonstrative—but now it seems I'm to lose him doubly. (*Tears come to her eyes. She moves towards the window R. and uses her handkerchief.*)

BLINN. I'm really awfully sorry. Please don't cry, or you'll start me, and that would be a horrible sight.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*controls herself and looks round on him proudly.*) I never cry!

BLINN. I'm awfully glad.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*coming down to him after secretly wiping her eyes.*) Ripley has left me.

BLINN. Oh!

MRS. GUILDFORD. We differed, not only about the Flying Corps, but about your niece. He simply packed up his things and left.

BLINN. There's a young rascal for you!

MRS. GUILDFORD. Please take me seriously. I'm in deep distress.

BLINN. Dear lady, I assure you I'm simply brimming over with sympathy—but what can I do?

MRS. GUILDFORD. Give me back my son.

BLINN. But I haven't got the young fellow.

MRS. GUILDFORD. He is here!

BLINN. Here? Do sit down, and we'll talk it over quietly, reasonably, like old—old—— (*He hesitates.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD (*looking him in the face.*) Friends?

BLINN. Yes—friends. It's a beautiful word. (*She sits on chair R. of table.*) What makes you think he's here?

MRS. GUILDFORD. I have seen him.

BLINN. Where? (*He sits on chair L. of table.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD. On the— (*She corrects herself.*) He's playing croquet.

BLINN (*with gentle insistence.*). On the croquet lawn?

MRS. GUILDFORD (*looking at him with a half-smile.*) Yes.

BLINN. Alone?

MRS. GUILDFORD. No, with your wife's niece.

BLINN. Let's call her Susan—she's only a girl.

MRS. GUILDFORD. Certainly, if you prefer it.

BLINN. How came you to see them? The croquet lawn is at the bottom of the garden.

MRS. GUILDFORD. I heard the clicking of the balls, and followed the sound.

BLINN. Did they see you?

MRS. GUILDFORD. No, I was concealed from view by the—the—— (*She hesitates.*)

BLINN (*encouragingly*). Trees?

MRS. GUILDFORD. That sort of thing—small ones.

BLINN. Shrubs, perhaps?

MRS. GUILDFORD. One might say so.

BLINN (*gladly*). Why, I know where you were. You were in the shrubbery! (*Their eyes meet. He laughs—she can't resist laughing too, but only for a moment.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD. You really are the oddest person. Very well, then, I saw Ripley and your—(*corrects herself*)—and Susan from the shrubbery. (*She emphasizes the word.*) In the intervals of playing croquet they were holding hands. . . . Can't you understand how I feel about it? This morning Ripley parted from his mother in anger, and this afternoon he—he——

BLINN. He's having a good time.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*with great vexation*). Between you all you've bewitched the boy, and I'm a failure.

BLINN. Shall I chase the little devil off the premises?

MRS. GUILDFORD. Don't talk nonsense. You know very well he'd return to-morrow.

BLINN. Probably, directly my back is turned. Between you and I—(*corrects himself*)—between you and me—which is it?

MRS. GUILDFORD. You and me.

BLINN. I thought you'd know! Between you and myself I'm off to join the Foreign Legion to-morrow.

MRS. GUILDFORD. Oh, then it's as well I called to-day.

Mr. Corbett, I know I may appeal to you as an officer and a gentleman——

BLINN. I ceased to be an officer years ago, and we're all gentlemen nowadays.

MRS. GUILDFORD. I know all about you. I made use of my telephone this morning.

BLINN. The resources of civilization are inexhaustible.

MRS. GUILDFORD. And I know you're one of the Shropshire Corbetts, who have been on their own land for centuries.

BLINN. God knows how they got it, but I admit they've hung on.

MRS. GUILDFORD. And are reputed to have come over with the Conqueror.

BLINN. My family have always been careful to be on the winning side. That's why I'm now a democrat.

MRS. GUILDFORD. You must forgive my saying so, but you really are an awful humbug!

BLINN. Dear lady, you see before you only a simple-minded old war-dog, covered with scars and in patient search of more. (*Mrs. Guildford looks at him and then laughs merrily and quite naturally.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD. I insist you're an awful humbug—but a very delightful one.

BLINN. Are you aware you're saying nice things to me?

MRS. GUILDFORD. Yes.

BLINN. Is it because I'm a Shropshire Corbett or a democrat?

MRS. GUILDFORD. Both, perhaps.

BLINN (*sitting up and looking at her*). I know what you're doing. You're at woman's old and favorite pastime.

MRS. GUILDFORD. What's that?

BLINN. Twisting a man round her little finger.

MRS. GUILDFORD. Nonsense. You would be too difficult.

BLINN (*rises, backing, and pointing his finger at her*).

You know you've made up your mind; but you want me to build a bridge for your pride. You want me to say, "Give the girl the boy"—but I shan't. I said it once. It's your turn.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*rises and faces him*). Give the boy the girl.

BLINN. I'd like to—but she's not mine, she's my wife's.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*a little disappointed*). Oh, yes, of course. (*Moving a step down R.*)

BLINN. She's her niece, and it was she who brought her up so beautifully—I repeat, so beautifully.

MRS. GUILDFORD. Oh, yes—I admit—quite beautifully. But, naturally, a word from you——

BLINN (*exclaiming*). Oh, believe me, I don't count at all. That small wife of mine started twisting me round her little finger sixteen years ago and I've been on the wriggle ever since. You must get hold of her—— (*Going L. below sofa.*)

Enter Mrs. Corbett by French window. Seeing Mrs. Guildford is still there, Mrs. Corbett turns to make her escape.

BLINN (*raises his voice*). Hi! Georgie! Come back, darling. Dear Mrs. Guildford is here.

MRS. CORBETT (*returning*). I beg your pardon. (*She comes down R.C. to Mrs. Guildford.*) How do you do? (*She inclines her head but does not offer her hand.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD (*going to her with great cordiality*). Dear Mrs. Corbett, I'm afraid you'll think me rather an intruder. (*She frankly offers her hand, which Mrs. Corbett accepts.*) The truth is, I'm extremely anxious to efface the disagreeable impression I fear I made on you last night. (*She speaks quickly but very clearly. Blinn goes quietly behind his wife and takes off the big hat she is again wearing. He goes with it to sideboard. Mrs. Corbett takes no notice of the action except to put up her hand to feel that her hair is tidy.*) You must have

thought me a kind of she-bear—or even a she— a she-cat!

MRS. CORBETT (*with dignity*). Please don't mention it.

MRS. GUILDFORD. I'm sure you'll be very kind and attribute the irritation of the woman to the anxiety of the mother. Ripley—

MRS. CORBETT (*interrupting firmly*). He is a dear good boy.

MRS. GUILDFORD (*smiling*). He is indeed. I've just been watching him on the croquet lawn with your niece— (*correcting herself*)—with Susan. I had an excellent view of them from the shrubbery. (*She gives the word due importance. Mrs. Corbett can't suppress a smile of gratification. Blinn from well up L.C. listens to this with considerable satisfaction and amusement.*) They looked such a pair of dears, I was quite moved. They were obviously made for each other, and we older ones mustn't stand in their way, must we? I do hope you agree and will give that charming and beautifully brought up girl to my boy. (*Susan and Guildford appear at French window.*)

MRS. CORBETT (*who is now wreathed in smiles*). Oh, yes, I wouldn't stand in their way for anything in the whole world. (*She is deeply sincere.*) Dear Mrs. Guildford, love counts above all else, don't you think?

Enter Parsons with tea-pot, which she places on tea-table.

MRS. CORBETT. Let me give you a cup of tea. (*Exit Parsons, L. Mrs. Corbett takes Mrs. Guildford up, as Blinn, seeing Ripley and Susan at window, beckons them to come in. They enter the room and stand rather nervously near the window. Mrs. Guildford stops while Mrs. Corbett goes on to tea-table.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD (*with her best smile*). Come here, you two! (*They come closer, stop, and stand before her below table C.*) You certainly do make rather a handsome couple. (*She looks from one to the other, then lays a hand on the shoulder of each.*) Dear Ripley! Dear

Susan! (*With an arm round each she kisses them, then joins Mrs. Corbett with Ripley at tea-table. The eyes of Blinn and Susan meet. They smile at each other—Susan runs up L.C. and jumps into his arms.*)

SUSAN. Nunkie! (*They sway in a long embrace.*)

BLINN (*aside to her*). I've sold it.

SUSAN (*innocently*). What?

BLINN. The portrait of my dear old father. (*She laughs and playfully pushes him away.*)

Enter Hogg by door C.

HOGG (*to Blinn*). A telegram for you, sir.

BLINN. A telegram! I hate telegrams! I had one yesterday. They frighten me. Open it, Susan. (*Hands it to her.*)

SUSAN. No, thank you, Nunkie—they frighten me, too.

BLINN. Well, give it to your Aunt Georgie.

MRS. CORBETT (*who is pouring tea*). Certainly not. I shan't have anything to do with it. Besides, I'm busy. (*Susan hesitates, holding the telegram gingerly. She and Mrs. Corbett exchange glances.*)

HOGG. Is there any answer, sir? (*He is above Blinn L.*)

BLINN (*irritably*). How can I say if there's an answer when I don't know what's in the beastly thing. . . . Is there any one here who isn't frightened of telegrams?

GUILDFORD. Mother isn't. Mother isn't frightened of anything. (*Susan hands him the telegram and he hands it to his mother.*)

BLINN. Please, Mrs. Guildford.

MRS. GUILDFORD. But it may be of a private nature.

BLINN. We have no secrets from you now, dearest Mrs. Guildford. (*She looks up, comes down R.C., smiles at him, then opens telegram and reads.*)

MRS. GUILDFORD (*reading*). "Captain Blinn Corbett, Minford. Orders are being sent to you to proceed to join your reserve battalion on the 10th. So glad you have got back. Come and see me before you go. Faber." (*She looks up. They are all looking at Blinn. Susan and*

Mrs. Corbett have clutched hands nervously. Hogg, who is L. at the back, is obviously delighted. Slight pause. They all continue to look at Blinn. He comes to back of table, holds out his hand. Mrs. Guildford hands him telegram. He reads it and walks a little L. They all watch him till he speaks.)

BLINN (*with a sigh of pleasure*). They couldn't do without me after all. (*Slight pause, he drops his voice.*) Dear old sports! (*Going down L. Exit Hogg L.*)

MRS. CORBETT. Of course they couldn't, dear. (*Susan puts her hand affectionately for a moment on Mrs. Corbett's shoulder. Mrs. Corbett looks up and smiles at her knowingly. Susan and Ripley go to French window. Mrs. Corbett goes to Mrs. Guildford, who is still R.C.*) I must tell you, Mrs. Guildford, my husband is a great soldier. In Africa they called him—— (*She whispers in Mrs. Guildford's ear, Mrs. Guildford laughs and they go up R. together to tea-table.*)

BLINN (*during speech he crosses to arm-chair by fire and sits*). Many another man would have hung about the War Office, bothering people and working up the affair into a grievance. Just as if in this world anybody was ever attracted by a man with a grievance. No! Not I! (*He corrects himself.*) Not me! I remained absolutely composed and—well—you see the result! (*Mrs. Guildford joins Susan and Ripley by French window.*) The great thing on all occasions is to keep your composure. (*He is not looking at the others, who are busy talking. Blinn raises his voice.*) I said the great thing is to keep your composure. (*Slight pause. Mrs. Guildford, Susan, and Ripley are too interested in themselves to attend—Mrs. Corbett comes down back of Blinn's chair, unseen by him, carrying a cup of tea for him. In despair Blinn speaks to the universe.*) No one listens! No one cares!

MRS. CORBETT (*beside Blinn's chair L.*). I listen, dearest! I care! (*She hands him the tea and sinks on her knees beside his chair.*)

BLINN. Yes, but you don't count.

MRS. CORBETT (*a hand on his shoulder*). Oh, Blinn!

BLINN. No—because *you are me*. (*She smiles at him beautifully, then he turns his eyes from her and looks in front of him doubtfully.*) Or is it I?

Curtain.

END OF THE PLAY.

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