

WHY SHE WOULD NOT
A LITTLE COMEDY

A Path through a wood. A fine summer afternoon. A lady, good-looking, well dressed, and not over thirty is being conducted along the path by a burly and rather dangerous-looking man, middle aged, ugly, dressed in a braided coat and mutton fie cap which give him the air of being a hotel porter or commissionaire of some sort.

THE LADY. [stopping] Where are we now? I should hardly call this a short cut.

THE MAN. [truculently] Im damned if I know. Two miles from anywhere.

THE LADY. But you must know. You are a forest guide.

THE MAN. Guide my foot! Im no bloody guide. How much money have you got on you?

THE LADY. Why?

THE MAN. Because I mean to have it off you, see? Hand over.

THE LADY. Do you mean to rob me? You said you were a guide, and we agreed for seven-and-sixpence. I meant to give you ten shillings if you were civil, but now I will give you your seven-and-sixpence and not a penny more. If you dare try to rob me Ill call the police.

THE MAN. Call away. There isnt a copper within five miles. Are them pearls round your neck real? Whether or no I mean to have them. You have three pounds in notes in your handbag: I saw them when you paid the taxi. Are you going to hand over quietly or shall I have to take them? It'll hurt a bit.

A YOUNG MALE VOICE [very affable] Is there anything amiss? Can I help?

The Man and the Lady start violently, not having noticed the newcomer until he arrives between them. He is a likeable looking juvenile in a workman's cap, but otherwise might by his clothes be an artisan off duty or a gentleman. His accent is that of a wellbred man.

THE MAN [ferociously] Who the hell are you?

THE NEWCOMER. Nobody but a tramp looking for a job.

THE MAN. Well, dont you come interfering with me. Get out of here, double quick.

THE NEWCOMER [sunnily] Im in no hurry. The lady might like me to stay. If she wants a witness Im on the job.

THE LADY. Oh yes: please stay. This man is trying to rob me.

THE NEWCOMER. Oh dear! That wont do, you know, matey. Thou shalt not steal.

THE MAN [with exaggerated fierceness] Who are you calling matey? Listen here. Are you going to get out or have I to sling you out?

THE NEWCOMER [gaily] You can try. Im game for a scrap. Fists, catch as catch can, up and down wrestling, or all three together? Be quick. The mounted police patrol will pass at six. Take off your coat, and come on.

THE MAN [he is an abject coward] Easy, governor, easy. I dont want no fighting. All I asked of the lady was my money for guiding her.

THE NEWCOMER [to the Lady] Give it to him and get rid of him.

THE LADY. I never refused to give it to him. Here it is. [She gives the Man five shillings].

THE MAN [humbly] Thank you, lady. [He hurries away, almost running].

THE LADY. How brave of you to offer to fight that big man!

THE NEWCOMER. Bluff, dear lady, pure bluff. A bully is not always a coward; but a big coward is almost always a bully. I took his measure, that is all. Where do you want to go to?

THE LADY. To Timbertown. I live there. I am Miss White of Four Towers: a very famous old house. I can reward you handsomely for rescuing me when I get home.

THE NEWCOMER. I know the way. A mile and a half. Can you walk it?

THE LADY. Yes of course. I can walk ten miles.

THE NEWCOMER. Right O! Follow me.

They go off together.

SCENE II

At the gates of a pretentions country house surrounded, by a high stone wall and overshadowed by heavy elm trees. The wall is broken by four sham towers with battlemented tops.

The Newcomer and the Lady arrive. She opens her bag and takes out a key to unlock the wicket.

THE LADY. Here we are. This is my house.

THE NEWCOMER [looking at it] Oh. Is it?

He is not as much impressed as she expected. She fingers the cash Docket in her bag, and is obviously embarrassed.

THE NEWCOMER. You are safe at home now. I must hurry into the town to get a night's lodging. Goodnight, lady. [He turns to go].

THE LADY. O please wait a moment. I hardly know...

THE NEWCOMER. How much to tip me, eh?

THE LADY. Well, I must reward you. You have done me a great service, I promised.

THE NEWCOMER. You did. But rescuing ladies from robbers is not my profession: it is only my amusement as an amateur. But you can do something for me. You said your name was White. Your people are the greatest timber merchants and woodmen in the county. Well, Im a carpenter of sorts. Could you get me a job in the timber yard at three pound ten a week? I cant live on less.

THE LADY. Oh, Im sure I can. My grandfather is chairman of the Board. My brother is manager. What is your name? Where do you live?

THE NEWCOMER. My name is Henry Bossborn. I live nowhere, or where I can: I have no address, Ill call on Thursday at your kitchen door: you can leave word with your maid if there is any news for me. Good night.

THE LADY [very graciously] Au revoir.

BOSSBORN. Not necessarily. Adieu: remember me.

He goes decisively. She unlocks the wicket and goes home.

SCENE III

THE boardroom of White Sons and Bros. Ltd. In the chair old Reginald White, still keen and attentive, but mostly silent. Jasper White, domineering but not quite up to his father's mark, Montgomery Smith, counting-house chief, two clerks who make notes but say nothing, and three or four members of the Board, silent lookers-on. Bossborn, looking quite smart in a clean white collar and well brushed suit, is before them, bareheaded.

OLD REGINALD. Well, Bossborn, you have done a plucky service to my granddaughter, Miss Serafina White, who holds many shares in this concern.

BOSSBORN. Oh, nothing, sir. I could have killed the fellow.

OLD REGINALD. The lady says he was twice your size and weight. We must find you a job. You want one, dont you?

BOSSBORN. I want three pound ten a week, sir. I must live,

OLD REGINALD. You are a white collar case, I suppose. We shall have to make room for you in the counting house.

BOSSBORN, No, sir, manual worker, carpenter on the wages list. Three pound ten and the usual bonus, same as the rest in the carpenters' shop.

OLD REGINALD. Oh well, if you prefer it: that will be easy. [To Jasper] Tell him his duties.

JASPER [much more distant and peremptory] Youll be here at six on Monday morning, and clock in

sharp to the minute. We don't allow unpunctuality here. The foreman will direct you to a place on the bench, where you will be expected to work to work, mind you, not to dawdle until eleven, when you can knock off for five minutes for a cup of tea. Half an hour off for a meal at one. Work again at the bench until four. Overtime wages one and a half. Five day week: nothing on Saturdays. A week's notice if you are a slacker. That's all. You can go.

BOSSBORN. I'm very grateful to you gentlemen for offering me this job. But I'm afraid it will not suit me. I must take to the road again.

JASPER. Why? It is what you ask for.

BOSSBORN. I'm not that sort of man. I can't clock in, and work at regular hours at the bench. I can't do what you call work at all. It is not in my nature. I must come when I like and go when I like and stay away when I like. I get up at eight, breakfast at nine, and read the papers until ten. I've never in my life got up at five in the morning.

JASPER. In short, you are an unemployable walking gentleman. You expect to be paid three pound ten a week for doing nothing.

BOSSBORN. Three pound ten and the bonus. Not exactly for doing nothing. I ask to have the run of the works and just loaf round to see if there is anything I can do.

SMITH. Well, of all the! Just to snoop round and find out all our trade secrets and sell them to the next timber yard.

OLD REGINALD. We have no secrets here. All the world is welcome to learn the ways of White Ltd. Straightforward work and first quality. Let those who can copy us and welcome.

SMITH. Yes, sir, we know that. But this young fellow can make a living by going from one firm to another, taking a job and being sacked as a slacker at a fortnight's notice, then going on to the next shop and doing it again.

BOSSBORN. I can meet you on that. Take me on for a fortnight on my own terms. If at the end of the fortnight you find me worth keeping for another week you pay me for the whole three weeks, but if you find me no use I get no wages at all, nothing but the sack.

OLD REGINALD. How is that, Mr Smith?

SMITH. Well, sir, if you want a sleeping partner, this is the man for you. That is all I can say.

OLD REGINALD [rising] We'll try him. Come with me, Bossborn: my granddaughter is waiting in my private room to hear how you have got on.

BOSSBORN. Good morning, gentlemen. [He follows old Reginald out].

SMITH. The old man is going dotty. You really ought to take over, Mr Jasper.

JASPER. Let him have his way. We shall soon be rid of this rotten mess.

SCENE IV

THE drawing room of Four Towers, overcrowded with massive early Victorian furniture, thick curtains, small but heavy tables crowded with nicnacs, sea shells, stuffed birds in glass cases, carpets and wall paper with huge flower designs, movement obstructed and light excluded in every possible way.

Two years have elapsed since the incident in the wood. Bossborn, now a very smart city man, matured and important looking, is being entertained by Serafina.

BOSSBORN. Twice round the world!

SERAFINA. Yes, twice. And a winter in Durban.

BOSSBORN. Why twice?

SERAFINA. Once for sightseeing. But life in a pleasure ship is so easy and comfortable and careless and social that at the end of the trip you just stick to the ship and start again for another round-the-world cruise, mostly with the same people. Quite a lot of them spend their lives going round and round. It costs only about a thousand a year, and everything is done for you.

BOSSBORN. Then why did you come back here?

SERAFINA. Homesick. For me there is no place like Four Towers. Besides, I had to come back after father's death to settle about his will and all that. I shall never leave dear Four Towers again. I was born here, and I shall die here.

BOSSBORN. Hmmm! There are better places.

SERAFINA. Not for me. Nowhere on earth. But never mind that now. What about yourself? I hear you have made terrible changes in the company, and that you and Jasper are on very bad terms. You have pensioned off poor old Smith and dismissed four clerks who had been with us for sixteen years and never had a word against them.

BOSSBORN. Their work is done by a girl with a calculating and invoicing typewriter as big as herself. Smith was twenty-five years out of date. The waste of labor all over the place was frightful.

SERAFINA. Before I went away Jasper said that either you or he would have to go when father retired. We Whites like to be masters in our own house. I like to be mistress in mine.

BOSSBORN. Oh, that is all over. I've trained Jasper in my methods, and am now in business of my own.

SERAFINA. Have you set up in opposition to us?

BOSSBORN. Not at all. I'm still a director and shareholder. My own business is land agency, dealer in real estate, private banking, building, and so on. Anything there is money in and that I understand.

SERAFINA. How wonderful! And only two years ago you were a tramp looking for a job.

BOSSBORN. And you got one for me. What can I do for you in return?

SERAFINA. Well, there is something you could perhaps advise me on. My old nurse and housekeeper thinks there is something wrong with the drainage here, and the gardener thinks that two of the four towers are not quite safe. Would you greatly mind if I asked you to have a look round and tell me if there is really anything wrong, and if so what I ought to do about it?

BOSSBORN. I need not look round. I have had my eye on Four Towers for some time, and I know it inside and out. There is no drainage.

SERAFINA. No drainage! But there must be.

BOSSBORN. Absolutely none. The sewage has been simply soaking into the soil for heaven knows how many years. None of the towers are worth repairing. The one thing to be done is to blow them up, get rid of that prison wall, cut down those trees that shut out the sunlight, and knock down this ugly, unhealthy, troublesome, costly house. It is not fit to live in. Ill build you a modern house with a beautiful view in a better situation. This neighbourhood was fashionable fifty years ago: it is now east end. Ill build six prefabricated villas lettable at moderate rents to replace your four rotten old towers and bring you in a tidy addition to your income.

SERAFINA [rising in toiling wrath] Mr Bosssburn: leave my house!

BOSSBORN. Oh! [rising] Why?

SERAFINA. I can hardly speak. My house! My house, the great house of Timbertown, My beautiful house, built by my people and never lived in by anyone else, I was born here. And you dare!! Go; or I will call my servants to shew you out. And never approach my door again: it will be shut in your face.

BOSSBURN (quite unmoved] Think it over! I'll call again in a month. [He goes promptly].

Serafina rings the bell and strides about the room, then rings again violently three times. Her old nurse-housekeeper rushes in y alarmed,.

NURSE. What's the matter, dearie?

SERAFINA. If that man calls here again, shut the door in his face. Slam it. Set the dog on him if he wont go. Tell the maids.

NURSE. Oh, we couldnt do that. Hes such a gentleman. We'll say you are not at home.

SERAFINA. Youll obey my orders. Gentleman! Do you know what he has done?

NURSE. No, dearie. It must be something dreadful to put you into a state like this. What was it?

SERAFINA. He said that my house Four Towers! is ugly, unhealthy, troublesome, not fit to live in. My house! The house I was born in.

NURSE [unimpressed]. Well, you know, dearie, it is troublesome. We cant do without seven

housemaids, and they are always complaining and wont stay long. There are always one or two of them sick. Theres no life in the house with all those stairs to drag scuttles of coal up and down because there is no proper heating, only the old open grates. And the place is so dark with all those trees, and nothing to look at but a stone wall. In the kitchen they are always wondering why you live here instead of moving into a nice new house with every convenience.

SERAFINA [astounded] So you you! agree with him!

NURSE. Oh no, dearie, I could never agree with anyone against you. I know you think the world of the old house. But you can hardly blame the gentleman for saying what everybody says. He is such a nice gentleman. Think it over, dearie.

SCENE V

The lounge in an ultra modern country house dated 1895 contrasting strangely with Four Towers. As before^ Serafina hostess and Sossborn visitor.

BOSSBORN. Well, what is the matter today? Why have you sent for me?

SERAFINA. I want to have it out with you about my Thursday at-homes. You have stopped coming to them. Why?

BOSSBORN. Have I? Well, you see, I am full up of business all day. I have my own business to attend to all the forenoon, and in the afternoon there are Board meetings of directors and the County Council, and appointments of all sorts. Much as I like to turn up at your at-homes for the pleasure of seeing you I simply cannot find time for society and small talk. I am, unfortunately, a very busy man.

SERAFINA. How charmingly you pay out that budget of lies! A busy man can always find time to do anything he really wants to do, and excuses for everything he doesnt.

BOSSBORN. That is true. Ive not thought about it. To be quite frank, I dislike the society of ladies and gentlemen. They bore me. I am not at home among them. You know I am only an upstart tramp.

SERAFINA. Very clever. But a much bigger lie. I dont know where you got your courtly manners and the way you speak and carry your London clothes; but I know you are a cut above me socially, and look down on us poor provincials and tradespeople,

BOSSBORN. Well, suppose it is so. Let us assume that I was brought up as a court page, and was so bored by it that I broke loose from it, threw myself on the streets penniless just as Kropotkin when he grew out of being Tsar Alexander's page, chose an infantry regiment in Siberia instead of the Imperial Guards at the top of the tree in Petersburg. Such things happen. You may pretend that it happened to me. But if so does not this prove that I am not a snob?

SERAFINA. At last you may be telling the truth. But if you are not a snob why have you stopped coming to my at-homes? Answer me that.

BOSSBORN. Whats the use of answering if you will not believe a word I say? You seem to know the truth, whatever it may be. It is for you to tell it to me.

SERAFINA. The reason you have stopped coming is that you think I want to marry you.

BOSSBORN. Oh, nonsense!

SERAFINA. It is not nonsense. Do stop lying. It would be a social promotion for me. My old nurse, with her talk about your being a very nice gentleman, selected you for my husband from the time she first saw you. Everybody thinks I ought to get married before I am too old. If you came always to my at-homes they would think you are the man. That is what you are afraid of. You need not be afraid. I have sent for you to tell you that nothing on earth could induce me to marry you. So there. You can come as often as you like. I have no designs on you.

BOSSBORN. But have I offended you in any way? Are my manners inconsiderate?

SERAFINA. No. Your manners are perfect.

BOSSBORN. You just don't like me. Simply natural antipathy, eh?

SERAFINA. Not in the least. I like you and admire you more than any man I have ever known. You are a wonder.

BOSSBORN. Then why?

SERAFINA. I am afraid of you.

BOSSBORN. Afraid of Me!!! Impossible. How? Why? Are you serious?

SERAFINA. Yes: afraid of you. Everybody is afraid of you.

BOSSBORN. Is there any use in saying that you have no reason to be afraid of me?

SERAFINA. Yes I have. I like to be mistress in my own house, as I was in Four Towers.

BOSSBORN. But you would be mistress in my house if we married.

SERAFINA. No one will ever be mistress in any house that you are in. Only your slaves and your bedfellow.

BOSSBORN. This bewilders me. Have I ever forced you to do anything you did not want to do?

SERAFINA. No, for I always had to do what you wanted me to do. I was happy at Four Towers: I loved it: I was born there and mistress of it and of myself: it was sacred to me. I turned you out of it for daring to say a word against it. Where is it now? And where am I? Just where you put me: I might as well have been a piece of furniture. Here in this house of your choosing and your building I have heard my four towers being blown up, bang, bang, bang, bang, striking on my heart like an earthquake; and I never lifted my finger to stop you as I could have done if I had been my own mistress. At the works, where my grandfather always had the last word until he died, you came, and with Jasper and Smith and all the rest against you, you turned the whole place inside out: poor old Smith and his clerks had to retire; Jasper had to knuckle under; our splendid old craftsmen had to learn new machines or be sacked and replaced by American mechanics.

BOSSBORN. Yes yes yes; but they consented: they were willing. I doubled, trebled, quadrupled the product and the profit. You could not live in Four Towers now because you are so enormously more comfortable and civilized here. You can all do far more as you like with the leisure my reforms give you than you could before I came. Leisure is the only reality of freedom. I coerce nobody: I only point out the way.

SERAFINA. Yes: your way, not our way.

BOSSBORN. Neither my way nor yours. The way of the world. Some people call it God's way.

SERAFINA. Anyhow I will live my own life, not yours. If I marry, my choice will not be a Bossborn.

BOSSBORN. Is that final?

SERAFINA. Yes. Friendship only.

BOSSBORN. So be it. Good day to you.

He rises and goes out 'promptly, as before.

THE SIX OF CALAIS 1934

The Six of Calais was performed for the first time In Mr. Sydney Carroll's Open Air Theatre , in Regent's Park, London y on the ijth July 1934, with Phyllis Neilson Terry y Charles Carson, Leonard Shepherd, and Vincent Sternroyd in the four principal parts.

PREFATORY TO THE SIX OF CALAIS

THE most amusing thing about the first performance of this little play was the exposure it elicited of the quaint illiteracy of our modern London journalists. Their only notion of a king was a pleasant and highly respectable gentleman in a bowler hat and Victorian beard, shaking hands affably with a blushing football team. To them a queen was a dignified lady, also Victorian as to her coiffure, graciously receiving bouquets from excessively washed children in beautiful new clothes. Such were their mental pictures of Great Edward's grandson and his queen Philippa. They were hurt, shocked, scandalized at the spectacle of a medieval soldier-monarch publicly raging and cursing, crying and laughing, asserting his authority with thrasonic ferocity and the next moment blubbing like a child in his wife's lap or snarling like a savage dog at a dauntless and defiant tradesman: in short, behaving himself like an unrestrained human being in a very trying situation instead of like a modern constitutional monarch on parade keeping up an elaborate fiction of living in a political vacuum and moving only when his ministers pull his strings. Edward Plantagenet the Third had to pull everybody else's strings and pull them pretty hard, his father having been miserably killed for taking his job too lightly. But the journalist critics knew nothing of this. A King Edward who did not behave like the son of King Edward the Seventh seemed unnatural and indecent to them, and they rent their garments accordingly. They were perhaps puzzled by the fact that the play has no moral whatever. Every year or so I hurl at them a long play full of insidious propaganda, with a moral in every line. They never discover what I am driving at: it is always too plainly and domestically stated to be grasped by their subtle and far flung minds; but they feel that I am driving at something: probably something they had better not agree with if they value their livelihoods. A play of mine in which I am not driving at anything more than a playwright's direct business is as inconceivable by them as a medieval king.

Now a playwright's direct business is simply to provide the theatre with a play. When I write one with the additional attraction of providing the twentieth century with an up-to-date religion or the like, that luxury is thrown in gratuitously, and the play, simply as a play, is not necessarily either the better or the worse for it. What, then, is a play simply as a play?

Well, it is a lot of things. Life as we see it is so haphazard that it is only by picking out its key situations and arranging them in their significant order (which is never how they actually occur) that it can be made intelligible. The highbrowed dramatic poet wants to make it intelligible and sublime. The farce writer wants to make it funny. The melodrama merchant wants to make it as exciting as some people find the police news. The pornographer wants to make it salacious. All interpreters of life in action, noble or ignoble, find their instrument in the theatre; and all the academic definitions of a play are variations of this basic function.

Yet there is one function hardly ever alluded to now, though it was made much too much of from Shakespear's time to the middle of the nineteenth century. As I write my plays it is continually in my mind and very much to my taste. This function is to provide an exhibition of the art of acting. A good play with bad parts is not an impossibility; but it is a monstrosity. A bad play with good parts will hold the stage and be kept alive by the actors for centuries after the obsolescence of its mentality would have condemned it to death without them. A great deal of the British Drama, from Shakespear to Bulwer

Lytton, is as dead as mutton, and quite unbearable except when heroically acted, yet Othello and Richelieu can still draw hard money into the pay boxes, and The School For Scandal revives again and again with unabated vigor. Rosalind can always pull As You Like It through in spite of the sententious futility of the melancholy Jaques; and Millamant, impossible as she is, still produces the usual compliments to the wit and style of Congreve, who thought that syphilis and cuckoldry and concupiscent old women are things to be laughed at.

The Six of Calais is an acting piece and nothing else. As it happened, it was so well acted that in the eighteenth century all the talk would have been about Siddons as Philippa. But the company got no thanks except from the audience: the critics were prostrated with shock, damn their eyes!

I have had to improve considerably on the story as told by that absurd old snob Froissart, who believed that "to rob and pill was a good life" if the robber was at least a baron. He made a very poor job of it in my opinion.

THE SIX OF CALAIS

A.D. 4th August 1347. Before the walls of Calais on the last day of the siege. The pavilion of Edward III y King of England, is on your left as you face the walls. The pavilion of his consort Philippa of Hainault is on your right. Between them> near the King's pavilion, is a two-seated chair of state for public audiences. Crowds of tents cover the background; but there is a clear way in the middle through the camp to the great gate of the city with its drawbridge still u\$ and its flag still flying.

The Black Prince, aged 17, arrives impetuously past the Queen's tent, a groom running after him.

THE PRINCE. Here is the King's pavilion without a single attendant to announce me. What can the matter be?

A child's scream is heard from the royal pavilion; and John of Gaunt, aged 7, dashes out and is making for his mother's tent when the Prince seizes him.

THE PRINCE. How now, Johnny? Whats the matter?

JOHN [struggling] Let me go. Father is in a frightful wax.

THE PRINCE. I shall be in a wax myself presently. [Releasing him] OS with you to mother. [The child takes refuge in the Queen's pavilion].

THE KING'S VOICE. Grrr! Yah! Why was I not told? Gogswoons, why was I not told? [Edward III, aged 35, dashes from his pavilion, foaming]. Out! [The groom flies for his life]. How long have you been here? They never tell me anything. I might be a dog instead of a king.

THE PRINCE [about to kneel] Majesty

THE KING. No no: enough of that. Your news. Anything from Scotland? Anything from Wales?

THE PRINCE. I...

THE KING [not waiting for the answer] The state of things here is past words. The wrath of God and all his saints is upon this expedition.

THE PRINCE. I hope not, sir.

THE KING [raging on] May God wither and blast this accursed town! You would have thought that these dogs would have come out of their kennels and groveled for mercy at my summons. Am I not their lawful king, ha?

THE PRINCE. Undoubtedly, sir. They...

THE KING. They have held me up for twelve months! A whole year!! My business ruined! My plans upset! My money exhausted! Death, disease, mutiny, a dog's life here in the field winter and summer. The bitch's bastard who is in command of their walls came to demand terms from me! to demand terms!!! looked me straight in the eyes with his head up as if I I, his king! were dirt beneath his feet. By God, I will have that head: I will kick it to my dogs to eat. I will chop his insolent herald into four quarters

THE PRINCE [shocked] Oh no, sir: not a herald: you cannot do that.

THE KING. They have driven me to such extremity that I am capable of cutting all the heralds in Christendom into their quarterings. [He sits down in his chair of state and suddenly becomes ridiculously sentimental]. I have not told you the worst. Your mother, the Queen, my Philippa, is here: here! Edward, in her delicate state of health. Even that did not move them. They want her to die: they are trying to murder her and our innocent unborn child. Think of that, boy: oh, think of that [he almost weeps].

THE PRINCE. Softly, father: that is not their fault: it is yours.

THE KING. Would you make a jest of this? If it is not their fault it shall be their misfortune; for I will have every man, woman, and child torn to pieces with red hot pincers for it.

THE PRINCE. Truly, dear Sir, you have great cause to be annoyed; but in sober earnest how does the matter stand? They must be suffering the last extremity of famine. Their walls may hold out; but their stomachs cannot. Cannot you offer them some sort of terms to end the business? Money is running short. Time is running short. You only make them more desperate by threatening them. Remember: it is good policy to build a bridge of silver for a flying foe.

THE KING. Do I not know it? Have I not been kind, magnanimous? Have I not done all that Christian chivalry could require of me? And they abuse my kindness: it only encourages them: they despise me for it.

THE PRINCE. What terms have you offered them?

THE KING. I have not threatened the life of a single knight. I have said that no man of gentle condition and noble blood shall be denied quarter and ransom. It was their knightly duty to make a show of arms against me. But [rising wrathfully] these base rascals of burgesses: these huckstering hounds of merchants who have made this port of Calais a nest of pirates: these usurers and tradesmen: these rebel

curs who have dared to take up arms against their betters: am I to pardon their presumption? I should be false to our order, to Christendom, if I did not make a signal example.

THE PRINCE. By all means, sir. But what have you demanded?

THE KING. Six of the most purseproud of their burgesses, as they call themselves by God, they begin to give themselves the airs of barons six of them are to come in their shirts with halters round their necks for me to hang in the sight of all their people. [Raising Ms voice again and storming] They shall die the dog's death they deserve. They shall

A court lady comes in.

THE COURT LADY. Sir: the Queen. Sssh!

THE KING [subsiding to a whisper] The Queen! Boy: not a word here. Her condition: she must not be upset: she takes these things so amiss: be discreet, for heaven's sake.

Queen Philippa, aged 33, comes from her pavilion,attended.

THE QUEEN. Dear child: welcome.

THE PRINCE. How do you, lady mother? [He kisses her hand].

THE KING [solicitously] Madam: are you well wrapped up? Is it wise to come into the cold air here? Had they better not bring a brazier and some cushions, and a hot drink a posset

THE QUEEN [curtseying] Sir: beloved: dont fuss. I am very well, and the air does me good. [To the Prince] You must cheer up your father, my precious. He will fret about my health when it is his own that needs care. I have borne him eleven children; and St Anne be my witness they have cost less looking after than this one big soldier, the greatest baby of them all. [To the King] Have you put on your flannel belly band, dearest?

THE KING. Yes, yes, yes, my love: do not bother about me. Think of yourself and our child

THE QUEEN. Oh, leave me to take care of myself and the child. I am no maternal malingreuse I promise you. And now, sir sonny, tell me all your news. I

She is interrupted by a shrill trumpet call.

THE KING. What is that? What now?

John of Gaunt, who has been up to the town gates to see the fan, runs in excitedly.

JOHN OF GAUNT [bending his knee very perfunctorily] Sire: they have surrendered: the drawbridge is down. The six old men have come out in their shirts with ropes round their necks.

THE KING [clouting him] Sssh! Hold your tongue, you young devil.

THE QUEEN. Old men in their shirts in this weather!! They will catch cold.

THE KING. It is nothing, madam my love: only the ceremony of surrender. You must go in: it is not fitting that these half naked men should be in your presence. I will deal with them.

THE QUEEN. Do not keep them too long in the cold, dearest sir.

THE KING [luxuriously waving her a kiss] My love!

The Queen goes into her pavilion; and a group of noblemen attendant on the King, including Sir Walter Manny and the Lords Derby, Northampton[^] and Arundel y issue from their tents and assemble behind the chair of state y where they are joined by the Black Prince[^] who stands at the Kings right hand and takes charge of John of Gaunt.

THE KING, Now for these swine, these bloodsuckers. They shall learn [shouting] Fetch me these fellows in here. Drag them in, Ill teach them to hold me up here for twelve months. Ill

The six burgesses, hustled by men-at-arms, enter in their shirts and halters, each carrying a bunch of massive iron keys. Their leader, Eustache de St Pierre, kneels at the King's feet. Four of his fellow victims[^] Piers de Wissant, Jacques de Wissant, Jean d'Aire, and Gilles d'Oudebolle, kneel in fairs behind him, and, following his example, lay their keys on the ground. They are deeply cast down, bearing themselves like condemned men, yet maintaining a melancholy dignity. Not so the sixth, Piers de Rosty (nicknamed Hardmouth), the only one without a grey or white beard. He has an extraordinarily dogged chin with a few bristles on it. He deliberately separates himself from the rest by passing behind the royal chair to the King's right and planting himself stiffly erect in an attitude of intense recalcitrance. The King, scowling fiercely at St Pierre and the rest, does not notice this until Peter flings down his keys with a violence which suggests that he would very willingly have brained Edward with them.

THE ICING. On your knees, hound.

PETER. I am a good dog, but not of your kennel, Neddy...

THE KING. Neddy!!!!

PETER. Order your own curs: I am a free burgess and take commands from nobody.

Before the amazed monarch can retort, Eustache appeals to Peter.

EUSTACHE. Master Peter: if you have no regard for yourself, remember that our people, our wives and children, are at the mercy of this great king.

PETER. You mistake him for his grandfather. Great! [He spits].

EUSTACHE. Is this your promise to be patient?

PETER. Why waste civilities on him, Master Mayor? He can do no worse than hang us; and as to the town, 7 would have burnt it to the last brick, and every man, woman and child along with it, sooner than surrender. I came here to make up the tale of six to be hanged. Well, he can hang me, but he shall not outface me. I am as good a dog as he, any day in the week.

THE PRINCE. Fie, fellow! is this a way for one of thy degree to speak to an anointed king? Bear thyself as befits one of thy degree in the royal presence, or by Holy Paul

PETER. You know how we have borne ourselves in his royal presence these twelve months. We have made some of you skip. Famine and not you, has beaten us. Give me a square meal and a good sword and stake all on a fair single combat with this big bully, or his black whelp here if he is afraid of me; and we shall see which is the better dog of the two.

THE KING. Drag him to his knees. Hamstring him if he resists.

Three men-at-arms dash at Peter and drag him to his knees. They take his halter and tie his ankles and wrists with it. Then they fling him on his side, where he lies helpless.

THE KING, And so, Master Burgess

PETER. BOW-WOW-WOW

THE KING [furious] Gag him. Gogswoons, gag him.

They tear a piece of linen from the back of his shirt^ and bind his mouth with it. He barks to the last moment. John of Gaunt laughs ecstatically at this performance, and sets off some of the soldiers.

THE KING. If a man laughs I will have him flayed Alive.

Dead silence.

THE KING. And now, fellows, what have ye to say to excuse your hardy and stubborn resistance for all these months to me, your king?

EUSTACHE. Sir, we are not fellows. We are free burgesses of this great city.

THE KING. Free burgesses! Are you still singing that song? Well, I will bend the necks of your burgesses when the hangman has broken yours. Am I not your overlord? Am I not your anointed king?

EUSTACHE. That is your claim, sir; and you have made it good by force of arms. We must submit to you and to God.

THE KING. Leave God out of this! What hast thou or thy like to do with God?

EUSTACHE. Nothing, sir: we would not so far presume. But with due respect to your greatness I would humbly submit to your Majesty that God may have something to do with us, seeing that he created us all alike and redeemed us by the blood of his beloved son.

THE KING [to the Prince] Can you make head or tail of this, boy? Is he accusing me of impiety? If he is, by God

EUSTACHE. Sir, is it for me to accuse you of anything? Here we kneel in the dust before you, naked and with the ropes on our necks with which you will presently send us into the presence of our maker

and yours. [His teeth chatter].

THE KING. Ay: you may well tremble. You have cause.

EUSTACHE. Yes: I tremble; and my teeth chatter: the few I have left. But you gentlemen that see our miserable plight, I call on your generosity as noblemen, on your chivalry as good knights, to bear witness for us that it is the cold of the morning and our naked condition that shakes us. We kneel to implore your King's mercy for our wretched and starving townsfolk, not for ourselves.

THE KING. Whose fault is it that they are starving? They have themselves to thank. Why did they not open their gates to me? Why did they take arms against their anointed king? Why should I have mercy on them or on you?

EUSTACHE. Sir: one is merciful not for reasons, but for the love of God, at whose hand we must all sue for mercy at the end of our days.

THE KING. You shall not save yourself by preaching. What right have you to preach? It is for churchmen and learned divines to speak of these mysteries, not for tradesmen and usurers. I'll teach you to rebel against your betters, whom God has appointed to keep you in obedience and loyalty. You are traitors, and as traitors you shall die. Thank my mercy that you are spared the torments that traitors and rebels suffer in England. [Rising] Away with them to the hangman, and let our trumpeters summon the townspeople to the walls to take warning from their dangling corpses.

The three men-at-arms begin to lift Peter. The others lay hands on his five colleagues.

THE KING. No: let that hound lie. Hanging is too good for him.

The Queen hurries in with her ladies in great concern. The men-at-arms release the burgesses irresolutely. It is evident that the Queen's arrival washes out all the King's orders.

THE QUEEN. Sir, what is this they tell me?

THE KING [hurrying across to intercept her] Madam: this is no place for you. I pray you, retire. The business is one in which it becomes you not to meddle.

THE QUEEN [evading him and passing on to inspect the burgesses] But these gentlemen. They are almost naked. It is neither seemly nor sufficient. They are old: they are half frozen: they should be in their beds.

THE KING. They soon will be. Leave us, madam. This is business of State. They are suffering no more than they deserve. I beg and pray you I command you

THE QUEEN. Dear sir, your wishes are my law and your commands my duty. But these gentlemen are very cold.

THE KING. They will be colder presently, so you need not trouble about that. Will it please you, madam, to withdraw at once?

THE QUEEN. Instantly, my dear lord. [To Eustache] Sir: when his Majesty has ended his business with

you, will you and your friends partake of some cups of hot wine in my pavilion? You shall be furnished with gowns.

THE KING [choking with wrath] Hot wine!

EUSTACHE. Alas, madam, when the King has ended his business with us we shall need nothing but our coffins. I also beg you to withdraw and hasten our despatch to that court where we shall not be held guilty for defending our hearths and homes to the last extremity. The King will not be balked of his revenge; and we are shriven and ready.

THE QUEEN, Oh, you mistake, sir: the King is incapable of revenge: my husband is the flower of chivalry.

EUSTACHE. You little know your husband, madam. We know better what to expect from Edward Plantagenet.

THE KING [coming to him threateningly past his consort] Ha! do you, Master Merchant? You know better than the Queen! You and your like know what to expect from your lords and rulers! Well, this time you shall not be disappointed. You have guessed aright. You shall hang, every man of you, in your shirts, to make mirth for my horseboys and their trulls....

THE QUEEN. Oh ho

THE KING [thundering] Madam: I forbid you to speak. I bade you go: you would not; and now you shall see what I would have spared you had you been obedient. By God, I will be master in my own house and king in my own camp. Take these fellows out and hang them in their white beards.

The King takes his place on his chair of state with his arms folded implacably. The Queen follows him slowly and desolately. She takes her place beside him. The dead silence is very trying.

THE QUEEN [drooling in tears and covering her face with her hands] Oh!

THE KING [flinching] No no no no NO. Take her away.

THE QUEEN. Sir: I have been always a great trouble to you. I have asked you for a thousand favors and graces and presents. I am impatient and ungrateful, ever asking, asking, asking. Have you ever refused me even once?

THE KING. Well, is that a reason why I should give and grant, grant and give, forever? Am I never to have my own way?

THE QUEEN. Oh, dearest sir, when next I ask you for a great thing, refuse me: teach me a lesson. But this is such a little thing. [Heartbroken] I cannot bear your refusing me a little thing.

THE KING. A little thing! You call this a little thing!

THE QUEEN. A very very little thing, sir. You are the King: you have at your disposal thousands of lives: all our lives from the noblest to the meanest. All the lives in that city are in your hand to do as you will with in this your hour of victory: it is as if you were God himself. You said once that you

would lead ten kings captive to my feet. Much as I have begged from you I have never asked for my ten kings. I ask only for six old merchants, men beneath your royal notice, as my share of the spoils of your conquest. Their ransom will hardly buy me a new girdle, and oh, dear sir, you know that my old one is becoming too strait for me. Will you keep me begging so?

THE KING. I see very well that I shall not be allowed my own way. [He begins to cry].

THE QUEEN [throwing her arms round him] Oh, dear sir, you know I would die to spare you a moment's distress. There, there, dearest! [She pets him].

THE KING [blubbling] I am never allowed to do anything I want. I might as well be a dog as a king. You treat me like a baby.

THE QUEEN. Ah no: you are the greatest of kings to me, the noblest of men, my dearest lord and my dearest dearest love. [Throwing herself on her knees] Listen: do as you will: I will not say another word: I ask nothing.

THE KING. No: you ask nothing because you know you will get everything. [He rises, shouting] Take those men out of my sight.

THE PRINCE. What shall we do with them, sir?

THE KING [flinging himself back into his seat] Ask the Queen. Banquet them: feast them: give them my crown, my kingdom. Give them the clothes off my back, the bread out of my mouth, only take them away. Will you go, curses on you.

The five burgesses kneel gratefully to the Queen,

EUSTACHE [kissing her hand] Madam: our ransom shall buy you a threefold girdle of gold and a cradle of silver.

THE KING. Aye, well, see that it does: see that it docs.

The burgesses retire, bowing to the Queen, who, still on her knees > waves her hand graciously to them.

THE QUEEN. Will you not help me up, dear sir?

THE KING. Oh yes, yes \raising her]: you should be more careful: who knows what harm you may have done yourself flopping on your knees like that?

THE QUEEN. I have done myself no harm, dear sir; but you have done me a world of good. I have never been better nor happier in my life. Look at me. Do I not look radiant?

THE KING. And how do I look? Like a fool.

JOHN OF GAUNT. Sir: the men-at-arms want to know what they are to do with this fellow?

THE KING. Aye, I forgot him. Fetch him here.

The three men-at-arms carry Peter to the King y and fling Mm down. The King is now grinning. His paroxysm of tears has completely discharged his ill temper. It dawns on him that through Peter he may get even with Philippa for his recent domestic defeat.

THE QUEEN. Oh, the poor man has not even a proper shirt to wear. It is all torn: it is hardly decent.

THE KING. Look well at this man, madam. He defied me. He spat at me. There is no insult that he did not heap on me. He looked me in the face and spoke to me as if I were a scullion. I swear to you by the Holy Rood, he called me Neddy! Donkeys are called Neddy. What have you to say now? Is he, too, to be spared and petted and fed and have a gown from you?

THE QUEEN [going to Peter] But he is blue with cold. I fear he is dying. Untie him. Lift him up. Take that bandage off his mouth. Fie fie! I believe it is the tail of his shirt.

THE KING, It is cleaner than his tongue.

The men-at-arms release Peter "from his bonds and his gag. He is too stiff to rise. They full him to his feet.

PETER [as they lift him groaning and swearing] Ah~ ooh-oh-ow!

THE KING. Well? Have you learnt your lesson? Are you ready to sue for the Queen's mercy?

PETER. Yah! Henpecked! Kiss mammy!

THE KING [chuckles] Ha!

THE QUEEN [severely] Are you mad, Master Burgess? Do you not know that your life is in the King's hand? Do you expect me to recommend you to his mercy if you forget yourself in this unseemly fashion?

PETER. Let me tell you, madam, that I came here in no ragged shirt. I have a dozen shirts of as fine a web as ever went on your back. Is it likely that I, a master mercer, would wear aught but the best of the best to go to my grave in?

THE QUEEN. Mend your manners first, sir; and then mend your linen, or you shall have no countenance from me.

PETER. I have naught to do with you, madam, though I well see who wears the breeches in this royal household. I am not skilled in dealing with fine handsome ladies. Leave me to settle my business with your henpecked husband.

THE QUEEN. You shall suffer for this insolence. [To the King] Will you, my lord, stand by and hear me spoken to in this tone by a haberdasher?

THE KING \grinning] Nay: I am in a merciful mood this morning. The poor man is to be pitied, shivering there in his shirt with his tail torn off.

PETER. Shivering! You lie in your teeth, though you were fifty kings. No man alive shall pity Peter Hardmouth, a dog of lousy Champagne.

THE KINO \going to him] Ha! A dog of Champagne! Oh, you must pardon this man, madam 9 for my grandmother hailed from that lousy province; so I also am a dog of Champagne. We know one another's bark, [Turning on him wxth bristling teeth\ Eh?

PETER I growling in his face like a dog] Grrrr!!!

THE KING [returning the growl chin to chin] Grrrr! 1 1 III

They repeat this performance, to the great scandal of the Queen, until it develops into a startling imitation of a dog fight.

THE QUEEN [tearing the two dogs asunder] Oh, for shame, sir! And you, fellow: I will have you muzzled and led through the streets on a chain and lodged in a kennel.

THE KINO. Be merciful, lady. I have asked you for many favors, and had them granted me too, as the world, please God, will soon have proof. Will you deny me this?

THE QUEEN. Will you mock my condition before this insolent man and before the world? I will not endure it.

THE KING. Faith, no, dearest: no mockery. But you have no skill in dealing with the dogs of lousy champagne. We must pity this poor trembling fellow.

THE QUEEN [angrily] He is not trembling.

PETER. No, by all the saints in heaven and devils in hell. Well said, lass.

He nudges her, to her extreme indignation.

THE KING. Hear that, dearest: he calls thee lass. Be kind to him. He is only a poor old cur who has lost half his teeth. His condition would move a heart of stone.

PETER. I may be an old cur, but if I had sworn to hang the six of us as he swore, no shrew should scold me out of it, nor any softbosomed beauty wheedle me out of it. Yah, cry baby! Give her your sword and sit in the corner with her distaff. The grey mare is the better horse here. Do your worst, dame: I like your spunk better than his snivel.

THE QUEEN [raging] Send him away, sir. He is too Ugly, and his words are disgusting. Such objects should be kept out of my sight: would you have me bear you a monster? Take him away.

THE KING. Away with him. Hurt him not 5 but let him not come into the Queers presence. Quick there. Off with him.

The men-at-arms lay hands on Peter who struggles violently.

PETER, Hands off me, spaniels. Arrr! Grrr! [As they drag him out overpowered] Gee-up, Neddy. [He

finishes with a spirited imitation of & donkey's &ray].

THE KING. That is how they build men in Champagne. By the Holy Rood I care not if a bit of him gets into our baby.

THE QUEEN. Oh, for shame! for shame! Have men no decency?

The King snatches her into his arms, laughing boisterously. The laugh spreads to all the soldiers and courtiers. The whole camp seems in a hilarious uproar.

THE QUEEN. No no: for shame! for shame!

The King slops her mouth with a kiss. Peter brays melodiously in the distance.

ANNAJANSKA, THE BOLSHEVIK EMPRESS

A REVOLUTIONARY ROMANCELET

Annajanska was first performed at the Coliseum Theatre in London on the 21 st January 1918, with Lillah McCarthy as the Grand Duchess, Henry Miller as Schneidekind, and Randle Ayrton as General Strammfest.

ANNAJANSKA is frankly a bravura piece. The modern variety theatre demands for its "turns" little plays called sketches, to last twenty minutes or so, and to enable some favorite performer to make a brief but dazzling appearance on some barely passable dramatic pretext. Miss Lillah McCarthy and I, as author and actress, have helped to make one another famous on many serious occasions, from Man and Superman to Androcles; and Mr Charles Ricketts has not disdained to snatch moments from his painting and sculpture to design some wonderful dresses for us. We three unbent as Mrs Siddons, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Dr Johnson might have unbent, to devise a "turn" for the Coliseum variety theatre. Not that we would set down the art of the variety theatre as something to be condescended to, or our own art as elephantine. We should rather crave indulgence as three novices fresh from the awful legitimacy of the highbrow theatre.

Well, Miss McCarthy and Mr Ricketts justified themselves easily in the glamor of the footlights, to the strains of Tchaikovsky's 1812. I fear I did not. I have received only one compliment on my share; and that was from a friend who said "it is the only one of your works that is not too long." So I have made it a page or two longer, according to my own precept: EMBRACE YOUR REPROACHES: THEY ARE OFTEN GLORIES IN DISGUISE.

ANNAJANSKA, THE BOLSHEVIK EMPRESS

THE General's office in a military station on the east front in Beotia. An office table with a telephone, writing materials, official papers, etc., is set across the room. At the end of the table, a comfortable chair for the General. Behind the chair, a window. Facing it at the other end of the table, a plain wooden bench. At the side of the table, with its back to the door, a common chair, with a typewriter before it. Beside the door, which is opposite the end of the bench, a rack for caps and coats. There is nobody in the room.

General Strammfest enters, followed by Lieutenant Schneidekind. They hang up their cloaks and caps.

Schneidekind takes a little longer than Strammfest, who comes to the table. STRAMMFEST, Schneidekind.

SCHNEIDEKIND. Yes, Sir.

STRAMMFEST. Have you sent my report yet to the government? [He sits down].

SCHNEIDEKIND [coming to the table] Not yet, sir. Which government do you wish it sent to? [He sits down].

STRAMMFEST. That depends, Whats the latest? Which of them do you think is most likely to be in power tomorrow morning?

SCHNEIDEKIND. Well, the provisional government was going strong yesterday. But today they say that the prime minister has shot himself, and that the extreme left fellow has shot all the others.

STRAMMFEST. Yes: thats all very well; but these fellows always shoot themselves with blank cartridge,

SCHNEIDEKIND. Still, even the blank cartridge means backing down. I should send the report to the Maximilianists,

STRAMMFEST. Theyre no stronger than the Oppidoshavians; and in my own opinion the Moderate Red Revolutionaries are as likely to come out on top as either of them.

SCHNEIDEKIND. I can easily put a few carbon sheets in the typewriter and send a copy each to the lot.

STRAMMFEST. Waste of paper. You might as well send reports to an infant school. [He throws his head on the table with a groan].

SCHNEIDEKIND. Tired out, sir?

STRAMMFEST. O Schneidekind, Schneidekind, how can you bear to live?

SCHNEIDEKIND. At my age, sir, I ask myself how can I bear to die?

STRAMMFEST. You are young, young and heartless. You are excited by the revolution: you are attached to abstract things like liberty. But my family has served the Panjandruns of Beotia faithfully for seven centuries. The Panjandruns have kept our place for us at their courts, honored us, promoted us, shed their glory on us, made us what we are. When I hear you young men declaring that you are fighting for civilization, for democracy, for the overthrow of militarism, I ask myself how can a man shed his blood for empty words used by vulgar tradesmen and common laborers: mere wind and stink, [He rises, exalted by his theme]. A king is a splendid reality, a man raised above us like a god. You can see him; you can kiss his hand; you can be cheered by his smile and terrified by his frown. I would have died for my Panjandrum as my father died for his father. Your toiling millions were only too honored to receive the toes of our boots in the proper spot for them when they displeased their betters. And now what is left in life for me? [He relapses into his chair discouraged]. My Panjandrum is deposed and transported to herd with convicts. The army, his pride and glory, is paraded to hear

sedition speeches from penniless rebels, with the colonel actually forced to take the chair and introduce the speaker, I myself am made Commander-in-Chief by my own solicitor: a Jew, Schneidekind! a Hebrew Jew! It seems only yesterday that these things would have been the ravings of a madman: today they are the commonplaces of the gutter press. I live now for three objects only: to defeat the enemy, to restore the Panjandrum, and to hang my solicitor.

SCHNEIDEKIND. Be careful, sir: these are dangerous views to utter nowadays. What if I were to betray you?

STRAMMFEST. What!

SCHNEIDEKIND. I won't, of course: my own father goes on just like that; but suppose I did?

STRAMMFEST [chuckling] I should accuse you of treason to the Revolution, my lad; and they would immediately shoot you, unless you cried and asked to see your mother before you died, when they would probably change their minds and make you a brigadier. Enough. [He rises and expands his chest]. I feel the better for letting myself go. To business. [He takes up a telegram; opens it; and is thunderstruck by its contents]. Great heaven! [He collapsed into his chair]. This is the worst blow of all.

SCHNEIDEKIND. What has happened? Are we beaten?

STRAMMFEST. Man: do you think that a mere defeat could strike me down as this news does: I, who have been defeated thirteen times since the war began? O, my master, my master, my Panjandrum! [He is convulsed with sobs].

SCHNEIDEKIND. They have killed him?

STRAMMFEST. A dagger has been struck through his heart

SCHNEIDEKIND. Good God!

STRAMMFEST. and through mine, through mine.

SCHNEIDEKIND [relieved] Oh: a metaphorical dagger. I thought you meant a real one. What has happened?

STRAMMFEST. His daughter, the Grand Duchess Annajanska, she whom the Panjandrina loved beyond all her other children, has has [he cannot finish].

SCHNEIDEKIND. Committed suicide?

STRAMMFEST. No. Better if she had. Oh, far far better.

SCHNEIDEKIND [in hushtdtones] Left the Church?

STRAMMFEST [shocked] Certainly not. Do not blaspheme, young man.

SCHNEIDEKIND. Asked for the vote?

STRAMMFEST. I would have given it to her with both hands to save her from this.

SCHNEIDEKIND. Save her from what? Dash it, sit, out with it.

STRAMMFEST. She has joined the Revolution.

SCHNEIDEKIND. But so have you, sir. We've all joined the Revolution. She doesn't mean it any more than we do.

STRAMMFEST. Heaven grant you may be right! But that is not the worst. She has eloped with a young officer. Eloped, Schneidekind, eloped!

SCHNEIDEKIND [not particularly impressed] Yes, sir.

STRAMMFEST. Annajanska, the beautiful, the innocent, my master's daughter! [He buries his face in his hands].

The telephone rings.

SCHNEIDEKIND [taking the receiver] Yes: G.H.Q. Yes.... Don't bawl: I'm not a general. Who is it speaking?... Why didn't you say so? don't you know your duty? Next time you will lose your stripe. Oh, they've made you a colonel, have they? Well, they've made me a field-marshal: now what have you to say?... Look here: what did you ring up for? I can't spend the day here listening to your cheek. What! the Grand Duchess! [Strammfest starts]. Where did you catch her?

STRAMMFEST [snatching the telephone and listening for the answer] Speak louder, will you: I am a General... I know that, you dolt. Have you captured the officer that was with her? .. Damnation! You shall answer for this: you let him go: he bribed you... You must have seen him: the fellow is in the full dress court uniform of the Panderobajensky Hussars. I give you twelve hours to catch him or—what's that you say about the devil? Are you swearing at me, you... Thousand thunders! [To Schneidekind] The swine says that the Grand Duchess is a devil incarnate. [Into the telephone] Filthy traitor: is that the way you dare speak of the daughter of our anointed Panjandrum? I'll

SCHNEIDEKIND [pulling the telephone from his lips] Take care, sir.

STRAMMFEST. I won't take care: I'll have him shot. Let go that telephone.

SCHNEIDEKIND. But for her own sake, sir

STRAMMFEST. Eh?

SCHNEIDEKIND, For her own sake they had better send her here. She will be safe in your hands.

STRAMMFEST (yielding the receiver) You are right. Be civil to him. I should choke [he sits down],

SCHNEIDEKIND [into the telephone] Hullo. Never mind all that: it's only a fellow here who has been fooling with the telephone. I had to leave the room for a moment. Wash out; and send the girl along. We'll jolly soon teach her to behave herself here.... Oh, you've sent her already. Then why the devil didn't you say so, you [he hangs up the telephone angrily]. Just fancy: they started her off this morning:

and all this is because the fellow likes to get on the telephone and hear himself talk now that he is a colonel. [The telephone rings again. He snatches the receiver furiously] Whats the matter now?...[To the General] It's our own people downstairs. [Into the receiver] Here! do you suppose Ive nothing else to do than to hang on to the telephone all day?. .. Whats that? Not men enough to hold her! What do you mean? [To the General] She is there, sir.

STRAMMFEST. Tell them to send her up. I shall have to receive her without even rising, without kissing her hand, to keep up appearances before the escort. It will break my heart.

SCHNEIDEKIND [into the receiver] Send her up.... Tcha! [He hangs up the receiver]. He says she is halfway up already: they couldnt hold her,

The Grand Duchess bursts into the room, dragging with her two exhausted soldiers hanging on desperately to her arms. She is enveloped from head to foot by a fur-lined cloak, and wears a fur cap.

SCHNEIDEKIND [pointing to the bench] At the word Go, place your prisoner on the bench in a sitting posture; and take your seats right and left of her. Go.

The two soldiers make a supreme effort to force her to sit down. She flings them back so that they are forced to sit on the bench to save themselves from falling backwards over it, and is herself dragged into sitting between them. The second soldier \ holding on tight to the Grand Duchess with one hand, produces papers with the other, and waves them towards Schneidekind, who takes them from him and passes them on to the General. He opens them and reads them with a grave expression,

SCHNEIDEKIND. Be good enough to wait, prisoner, until the General has read the papers on your case.

THE GRAND DUCHESS [to the soldiers] Let go. [To Strammfest] Tell them to let go, or I'll upset the bench backwards and bash our three heads on the floor.

FIRST SOLDIER. No, little mother. Have mercy on the poor.

STRAMMFEST [growling over the edge of the paper he is reading] Hold your tongue.

THE GRAND DUCHESS [Uoizing] Me, or the soldier?

STRAMMFEST [horrified] The soldier, madam.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Tell him to let go.

STRAMMFEST. Release the lady.

The soldiers take their hands off her. One of them wipes his fevered brow. The other sucks his wrist.

SCHNEIDEKIND [fiercely] 'tention!

The two soldiers sit up stiffly.

THE GRAND DUCHESS, Oh, let the poor man suck his wrist. It may be poisoned. I bit it.

STRAMMFEST [shocked] You bit a common soldier!

GRAND DUCHESS, Well, I offered to cauterize it with the poker in the office stove. But he was afraid. What more could I do?

SCHNEIDEKIND, Why did you bite him, prisoner?

THE GRAND DUCHESS, He WOULD HOt let gO.

STRAMMFEST. Did he let go when you bit him?

THE GRAND DUCHESS, No. [Patting the soldier on the tack] You should give the man a cross for his devotion. I could not go on eating him; so I brought him along with me.

STRAMMFEST. Prisoner

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Dont call me prisoner. Genera! Strammfest. My grandmother dandled you on her knee.

STRAMMFEST [bursting into tears] O God, yes. Believe me, jiy heart is what it was then.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Your brain also is what it was then. I will not be addressed by you as prisoner.

STRAMMFEST. I may not, for your own sake, call you by your rightful and most sacred titles. What am I to call you?

THE GRAND DUCHESS. The Revolution has made us comrades. Call me comrade.

STRAMMFEST. I had rather die.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Then call me Annajanska; and I will call you Peter Piper, as grandmamma did.

STRAMMFEST [painfully agitated] Schneidekind: you must speak to her: I cannot [he breaks down].

SCHNEIDEKIND [officially] The Republic of Beotia has been compelled to confine the Panjandrum and his family, for their own safety, within certain bounds. You have broken those bounds.

STRAMMFEST [taking the word from him] You are I must say it a prisoner. What am I to do with you?

THE GRAND DUCHESS. You should have thought of that before you arrested me.

STRAMMFEST. Come, come, prisoner! do you know what will happen to you if you compel me to take a sterner tone with you?

THE GRAND DUCHESS. No. But I know what will happen to you.

STRAMMFEST. Pray what, prisoner?

THE GRAND DUCHESS, Clergyman's sore throat.

Schneidekind splutters: drops a paper; and conceals his laughter under the table.

STRAMMFEST [thunderously] Lieutenant Schneidekind.

SCHNEIDEKIND [in a stifled voice] Yes, sir. [The table vibrates visibly].

STRAMMFEST. Come out of it, you fool: you're upsetting the ink.

Schneidekind merges, red in the face with suppressed mirth.

STRAMMFEST. Why don't you laugh? Don't you appreciate Her Imperial Highness's joke?

SCHNEIDEKIND [suddenly becoming solemn] I don't want to, sir.

STRAMMFEST. Laugh at once, sir. I order you to laugh.

SCHNEIDEKIND [with a touch of temper] I really can't, sir. [He sits down decisively].

STRAMMFEST [growling at him] Yah! [He turns impressively to the Grand Duchess] Your Imperial Highness desires me to address you as comrade?

THE GRAND DUCHESS [rising and waving a red handkerchief] Long live the Revolution, comrade!

STRAMMFEST [rising and shouting] Proletarians of all lands, unite. Lieutenant Schneidekind: you will rise and sing the Marseillaise.

SCHNEIDEKIND [rising] But I cannot, sir. I have no voice, no ear.

STRAMMFEST. Then sit down; and bury your shame in your typewriter [Schneidekind sits down]. Comrade Annajanska : you have eloped with a young officer.

THE GRAND DUCHESS [astounded] General Strammfest: you lie,

STRAMMFEST, Denial, comrade, is useless. It is through that officer that your movements have been traced. [The Grand Duchess is suddenly enlightened, and seems amused. Strammfest continues in a forensic manner] He joined you at the Golden Anchor in Hakonsburg, You gave us the slip there; but the officer was traced to Potterdam, where you rejoined him and went alone to Premyslople. What have you done with that unhappy young man? Where is he?

THE GRAND DUCHESS [pretending to whisper an important secret] Where he has always been.

STRAMMFEST [eagerly] Where is that?

THE GRAND DUCHESS [impetuously] In your imagination. I came alone. I am alone. Hundreds of

officers travel every day from Hakonsburg to Potterdam. What do I know about them?

STRAMMFEST. They travel in khaki. They do not travel in full dress court uniform as this man did.

SCHNEIDEKIND. Only officers who are eloping with grand duchesses wear court uniform: otherwise the grand duchesses could not be seen with them.

STRAMMFEST. Hold your tongue, [Schneidekind, in high dudgeons/olds his arms and retires from the conversation. The General returns to his paper and to his examination of the Grand Duchess] This officer travelled with your passport. What have you to say to that?

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Bosh! How could a man travel with a woman's passport?

STRAMMFEST. It is quite simple, as you very well know. A dozen travellers arrive at the boundary. The official collects their passports. He counts twelve persons; then counts the passports. If there are twelve, he is satisfied.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Then how do you know that one of the passports was mine?

STRAMMFEST. A waiter at the Potterdam Hotel looked at the officer's passport when he was in his bath. It was your passport.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Stuff! Why did he not have me arrested?

STRAMMFEST. When the waiter returned to the hotel with the police the officer had vanished; and you were there with your own passport. They knouted him.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Oh! Strammfest: send these men away. I must speak to you alone.

STRAMMFEST [rising in horror] No: this is the last straw: I cannot consent. It is impossible, utterly, eternally impossible, that a daughter of the Imperial House should speak to anyone alone, were it even her own husband.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. You forget that there is an exception. She may speak to a child alone. [She rises] Strammfest: you have been dandled on my grandmother's knee. By that gracious action the dowager Panjandrina made you a child forever. So did Nature, by the way. I order you to speak to her alone. Do you hear? I order you. For seven hundred years no member of your family has ever disobeyed an order from a member of mine. Will you disobey me?

STRAMMFEST. There is an alternative to obedience. The dead cannot disobey. [He takes out his pistol and places the muzzle against his temple].

SCHNEIDEKIND [snatching the pistol from him] For God's sake, General

STRAMMFEST [attacking him furiously to recover the weapon] Dog of a subaltern, restore that pistol, and my honor.

SCHNEIDEKIND [reaching out with the pistol to the Grand Duchess] Take it: quick: he is as strong as a bull.

THE GRAND DUCHESS [snatching it] Aha! Leave the room, all of you except the General. At the double! lightning! electricity! [she fires shot after shot, spattering bullets about the ankles of the soldiers. They fly precipitately. She turns to Schneidekindy who has by this time been flung on the floor by the General] You too. [He scrambles up]. March [he flies to the door].

SCHNEIDEKIND [turning at the door] For your own sake, comrade

THE GRAND DUCHESS [indignantly] Comrade! You!!! Go. [She fires two more shots. He vanishes].

STRAMMFEST [making an impulsive movement towards her] My Imperial Mistress

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Stop. I have one bullet left, if you attempt to take this from me
[putting the pistol to her temple]. \

STRAMMFEST [recoiling, and covering his eyes with his hands]. No no: put it down: put it down. I promise everything: I swear anything; put it down, I implore you.

THE GRAND DUCHESS [throwing it on the table] There!

STRAMMFEST [uncovering his eyes] Thank God!

THE GRAND DUCHESS [gently] Strammfest: I am your comrade. Am I nothing more to you?

STRAMMFEST [falling on his knee] You are, God help me, all that is left to me of the only power I recognize on earth. [He kisses her hand].

THE GRAND DUCHESS [indulgently] Idolater! When will you learn that our strength has never been in ourselves, but in your illusions about us? [She shakes of her kindness, and sits down in his chair] Now tell me, what are your orders? And do you mean to obey them?

STRAMMFEST [starting like a goaded ox, and blundering fretfully about the room] How can I obey six different dictators, and not one gentleman among the lot of them? One of them orders me to make peace with the foreign enemy. Another orders me to offer all the neutral countries 48 hours to choose between adopting his views on the single tax and being instantly invaded and annihilated. A third orders me to go to a damned Socialist Conference and explain that Boetia will allow no annexations and no indemnities, and merely wishes to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth throughout the universe. [He finishes behind Schneidekind's chair].

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Damn their trifling?

STRAMMFEST. I thank Your Imperial Highness from the bottom of my heart for that expression. Europe thanks you.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. M'yes; but [rising] Strammfest: you know that your cause the cause of the dynasty is lost.

STRAMMFEST. You must not say so. It is treason, even from you. [He sinks, discouraged, into the chair, and covers his face with his hand].

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Do not deceive yourself, General: never again will a Panjandrum reign in Beotia. [She walks slowly across the room, brooding bitterly, and thinking aloud]. We are so decayed, so out of date, so feeble, so wicked in our own despite, that we have come at last to will our own destruction.

STRAMMFEST. You are uttering blasphemy.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. All great truths begin as blasphemies. All the king's horses and all the king's men cannot set up my father's throne again. If they could, you would have done it, would you not?

STRAMMFEST. God knows I would!

THE GRAND DUCHESS. You really mean that? You would keep the people in their hopeless squalid misery? you would fill those infamous prisons again with the noblest spirits in the land? you would thrust the rising sun of liberty back into the sea of blood from which it has risen? And all because there was in the middle of the dirt and ugliness and horror a little patch of court splendor in which you could stand with a few orders on your uniform, and yawn day after day and night after night in unspeakable boredom until your grave yawned wider still, and you fell into it because you had nothing better to do. How can you be so stupid, so heartless?

STRAMMFEST. You must be mad to think of royalty in such a way. I never yawned at court. The dogs yawned; but that was because they were dogs: they had no imagination, no ideals, no sense of honor and dignity to sustain them.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. My poor Strammfest: you were not often enough at court to tire of it. You were mostly soldiering; and when you came home to have a new order pinned on your breast, your happiness came through looking at my father and mother and at me, and adoring us. Was that not so?

STRAMMFEST. Do you reproach me with it? I am not ashamed of it.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Oh, it was all very well for you, Strammfest. But think of me, of me! standing there for you to gape at, and knowing that I was no goddess, but only a girl like any other girl! It was cruelty to animals: you could have stuck up a wax doll or a golden calf to worship; it would not have been bored.

STRAMMFEST. Stop; or I shall renounce my allegiance to you. I have had women flogged for such seditious chatter as this.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Do not provoke me to send a bullet through your head for reminding me of it.

STRAMMFEST. You always had low tastes. You are no true daughter of the Panjandrums: you are a changeling, thrust into the Panjandrina's bed by some profligate nurse. I have heard stories of your childhood: of how

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Ha, ha! Yes: they took me to the circus when I was a child. It was my first moment of happiness, my first glimpse of heaven. I ran away and joined the troupe. They caught me and dragged me back to my gilded cage; but I had tasted freedom; and they never could make me forget

it.

STRAMMFEST. Freedom! To be the slave of an acrobat! to be exhibited to the public! to

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Oh, I was trained to that. I had learnt that part of the business at court.

STRAMMFEST. You had not been taught to strip yourself half naked and turn head over heels

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Man: I wanted to get rid of my swaddling clothes and turn head over heels. I wanted to, I wanted to, I wanted to. I can do it still. Shall I do it now?

STRAMMFEST. If you do, I swear I will throw myself from the window so that I may meet your parents in heaven without having my medals torn from my breast by them.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Oh, you are incorrigible. You are mad, infatuated. You will not believe that we royal divinities are mere common flesh and blood even when we step down from our pedestals and tell you ourselves what a fool you are. I will argue no more with you: I will use my power. At a word from me your men will turn against you: already half of them do not salute you; and you dare not punish them: you have to pretend not to notice it.

STRAMMFEST. It is not for you to taunt me with that if it is so.

THE GRAND DUCHESS [haughtily] Taunt! / condescend to taunt! To taunt a common General! You forget yourself, sir.

STRAMMFEST [dropping on his knee submissively] Now at last you speak like your royal self.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Oh, Strammfest, Strammfest, they have driven your slavery into your very bones. Why did you not spit in my face?

STRAMMFEST [rising with a shudder] God forbid!

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Well, since you will be my slave, take your orders from me. I have not come here to save our wretched family and our bloodstained crown, I am come to save the Revolution.

STRAMMFEST. Stupid as I am, I have come to think that I had better save that than save nothing. But what will the Revolution do for the people? Do not be deceived by the fine speeches of the revolutionary leaders and the pamphlets of the revolutionary writers. How much liberty is there where they have gained the upper hand? Are they not hanging, shooting, imprisoning as much as ever we did? Do they ever tell the people the truth? No: if the truth does not suit them they spread lies instead, and make it a crime to tell the truth.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Of course they do. Why should they not?

STRAMMFEST [hardly able to believe his ears] Why should they not!

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Yes: why should they not? We did it. You did it, whip in hand: you flogged women for teaching children to read.

STRAMMFEST. To read sedition. To read Karl Marx.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Pshaw! How could they learn to read the Bible without learning to read Karl Marx? Why do you not stand to your guns and justify what you did, instead of making silly excuses. Do you suppose / think flogging a woman worse than flogging a man? I, who am a woman myself!

STRAMMFEST. I am at a loss to understand your Imperial Highness. You seem to me to contradict yourself.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Nonsense! I say that if the people cannot govern themselves, they must be governed by somebody. If they will not do their duty without being half forced and half humbugged, somebody must force them and humbug them. Some energetic and capable minority must aJU ways be in power. Well, I am on the side of the energetic minority whose principles I agree with. The Revolution is as cruel as we were; but its aims are my aims. Therefore I stand for the Revolution.

STRAMMFEST. You do not know what you are saying. This is pure Bolshevism. Are you, the daughter of a Panjandrum, a Bolshevist?

THE GRAND DUCHESS. I am anything that will make the world less like a prison and more like a circus.

STRAMMFEST. Ah! You still want to be a circus star.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Yes, and be billed as the Bolshevik Empress. Nothing shall stop me. You have your orders, General Strammfest: save the Revolution,

STRAMMFEST. What Revolution? Which Revolution? No two of your rabble of revolutionists mean the same thing by the Revolution. What can save a mob in which every man is rushing in a different direction?

THE GRAND DUCHESS. I will tell you. The war can save it.

STRAMMFEST. The war?

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Yes, the war. Only a great common danger and a great common duty can unite us and weld these wrangling factions into a solid commonwealth.

STRAMMFEST. Bravo! War sets everything right: I have always said so. But what is a united people without a united army? And what can / do? I am only a soldier. I cannot make speeches: I have won no victories: they will not rally to my call [again he sinks into his chair with his former gesture of discouragement].

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Are you sure they will not rally to mine?

STRAMMFEST. Oh, if only you were a man and a soldier!

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Suppose I find you a man and a soldier?

STRAMMFEST [rising in a fury] Ah! the scoundrel you eloped with! You think you will shove this fellow into an army command, over my head. Never.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. You promised everything. You swore anything. [She marches as if in front of a regiment]. I know that this man alone can rouse the army to enthusiasm.

STRAMMFEST. Delusion! Folly! He is some circus acrobat; and you are in love with him.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. I swear I am not in love with him. I swear I will never marry him.

STRAMMFEST. Then who is he?

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Anybody in the world but you would have guessed long ago. He is under your very eyes.

STRAMMFEST [staring past her right and left] Where?

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Look out of the window.

He rushes to the window^ looking for the officer. The Grand Duchess takes of her cloak and appears in the uniform of the Pander obajensky Hussars.

STRAMMFEST [peering through the window] Where is he? I can see no one.

THE GRAND DUCHESS. Here, silly.

STRAMMFEST [turning] You! Great Heavens! The Bolshevik Empress!

AUGUSTUS DOES HIS BIT

A TRUE-TO-LIFE FARCE

Augustus Does His Bit was performed for the first time at the Court Theatre in London by the Stage Society on the list January 1917, with Lalla Vandervelde as The Lady y F. B. J. Sharp as Lord Augustus Highcastle, and Charles Rock as Horatio Floyd Beamish.

I WISH to express my gratitude for certain good offices which Augustus secured for me in January 1917. I had been invited to visit the theatre of war in Flanders by the Commander-in-Chief : an invitation which was, under the circumstances, a summons to duty. Thus I had occasion to spend some days in procuring the necessary passports and other official facilities for my journey. It happened just then that the Stage Society gave a performance of this little play. It opened the heart of every official to me. I have always been treated with distinguished consideration in my contacts with bureaucracy during the war; but on this occasion I found myself persona grata in the highest degree. There was only one word when the formalities were disposed of; and that was "We are up against Augustus all day." The shewing-up of Augustus scandalized one or two innocent and patriotic critics who regarded the

prowess of the British army as inextricably bound up with Highcastle prestige. But our Government departments knew better: their problem was how to win the war with Augustus on their backs, well-meaning, brave, patriotic, but obstructively fussy, self-important, imbecile, and disastrous.

Save for the satisfaction of being able to laugh at Augustus in the theatre, nothing, as far as I know, came of my dramatic reduction of him to absurdity. Generals, admirals, Prime Ministers and Controllers, not to mention Emperors, Kaisers and Tsars, were scrapped remorselessly at home and abroad, for their sins or services, as the case might be. But Augustus stood like the Eddystone in a storm, and stands so to this day. He gave us his word that he was indispensable; and we took it.

AUGUSTUS DOES HIS BIT The Mayor's parlor in the Town Hall of Little Pifflington Lord Augustus Highcastle, a distinguished member of the governing class, in the uniform of a colonel, and very well preserved at 45, is comfortably seated at a writing table with his heels on it, reading The Morning Post. The door faces him, a little to his left, at the other side of the room. The window is behind him. In the fireplace, a gas stove. On the table a bell button and a telephone. Portraits of past Mayors, in robes and gold chains, adorn the walls. An elderly clerk with a short white beard and whiskers, and a very red nose, shuffles in.

AUGUSTUS [hastily putting aside his paper and replacing his feet on the floor] Hullo! Who are you?

THE CLERK. The staff [a slight impediment in his speech adds to the impression of incompetence produced by his age and appearance].

AUGUSTUS. You the staff! What do you mean, man?

THE CLERK. What I say. There aint anybody else.

AUGUSTUS. Tush! Where are the others?

THE CLERK. At the front.

AUGUSTUS. Quite right. Most proper. Why arnt you at the front?

THE CLERK. Over age. Fiftyseven.

AUGUSTUS. But you can still do your bit. Many an older man is in the G.R/s, or volunteering for home defence.

THE CLERK. I have volunteered.

AUGUSTUS. Then why are you not in uniform?

THE CLERK. They said they wouldnt have me if I was given away with a pound of tea. Told me to go home and not be an old silly. [A sense of unbearable wrong, til now only smouldering in him, bursts into flame]. Young Bill Knight, that I took with me, got two and sevenpence. I got nothing. Is it justice? This country is going to the dogs, if you ask me.

AUGUSTUS [rising indignantly] I do not ask you, sir; and I will not allow you to say such things in my presence. Our statesmen are the greatest known to history. Our generals are invincible. Our army is the admiration of the world. [Furiously] How dare you tell me that the country is going to the dogs!

THE CLERK. Why did they give young Bill Knight two arid sevenpence, and not give me even my tram fare? Do you call that being great statesmen? As good as robbing me, I call it.

AUGUSTUS. Thats enough. Leave the room. [He sits down and takes up his pen, settling himself to work. The clerk shuffles to the door. Augustus adds, with cold politeness] Send me the Secretary.

THE CLERK. I'm the Secretary. I cant leave the room and send myself to you at the same time, can I?

AUGUSTUS. Dont be insolent. Where is the gentleman I have been corresponding with: Mr Horatio Floyd Beamish?

THE CLERK [returning and bowing] Here. Me.

AUGUSTUS. You! Ridiculous. What right have you to call yourself by a pretentious name of that sort?

THE CLERK. You may drop the Horatio Floyd. Beamish is good enough for me.

AUGUSTUS. Is there nobody else to take my instructions?

THE CLERK. It's me or nobody. And for two pins I'd chuck it. Dont you drive me too far. Old uns like me is up in the world now.

AUGUSTUS. If we were not at war, I should discharge you on the spot for disrespectful behavior. But England is in danger; and I cannot think of my personal dignity at such a moment. [Shouting at him] Dont you think of yours, either, worm that you are; or I'll have you arrested under the Defence of the Realm Act, double quick.

THE CLERK. What do I care about the realm? They done me out of two and seven

AUGUSTUS. Oh, damn your two and seven! Did you receive my letters?

THE CLERK. Yes.

AUGUSTUS. I addressed a meeting here last night went straight to the platform from the train. I wrote to you that I should expect you to be present and report yourself. Why did you not do so?

THE CLERK. The police wouldnt let me on the platform.

AUGUSTUS. Did you tell them who you were?

THE CLERK. They knew who I was. Thats why they wouldnt let me up.

AUGUSTUS. This is too silly for anything. This town wants waking up. I made the best recruiting speech I ever made in my life; and not a man joined.

THE CLERK. What did you expect? You told them our gallant fellows is falling at the rate of a thousand a day in the big push. Dying for Little Pifflington, you says. Come and take their places, you says. That aint the way to recruit.

AUGUSTUS. But I expressly told them their widows would have pensions.

THE CLERK. I heard you. Would have been all right if it had been the widows you wanted to get round.

AUGUSTUS [rising angrily] This town is inhabited by dastards. I say it with a full sense of responsibility, dastards! They call themselves Englishmen; and they are afraid to fight.

THE CLERK. Afraid to fight! You should see them on a Saturday night.

AUGUSTUS. Yes: they fight one another; but they wont fight the Germans.

THE CLERK. They got grudges again one another: how can they have grudges again the Huns that they never saw? Theyve no imagination: thats what it is. Bring the Huns here; and theyll quarrel with them fast enough.

AUGUSTUS [returning to his seat with a grunt of disgust] Mf! Theyll have them here if theyre not careful, [Seated] Have you carried out my orders about the war saving?

THE CLERK. Yes.

AUGUSTUS. The allowance of petrol has been reduced by three quarters?

THE CLERK. It has.

AUGUSTUS. And you have told the motor-car people to come here and arrange to start munition work now that their motor business is stopped?

THE CLERK. It aint stopped. Theyre busier than ever.

AUGUSTUS. Busy at what?

THE CLERK. Making small cars.

AUGUSTUS. New cars!

THE CLERK. The old cars only do twelve miles to the gallon. Everybody has to have a car that will do thirtyfive now.

AUGUSTUS. Cant they take the train?

THE CLERK. There aint no trains now. Theyve tore up the rails and sent them to the front.

AUGUSTUS. Psha!

THE CLERK. Well, we have to get about somehow.

AUGUSTUS. This is perfectly monstrous. Not in the least what I intended.

THE CLERK. Hell

AUGUSTUS. Sir!

THE CLERK [explaining Hell, they says, is paved with good intentions.

AUGUSTUS [springing to his feet] Do you mean to insinuate that hell is paved with my good intentions with the good intentions of His Majesty's Government?

THE CLERK. I dont mean to insinuate anything until the Defence of the Realm Act is repealed. It aint safe.

AUGUSTUS. They told me that this town had set an example to all England in the matter of economy. I came down here to promise the Mayor a knighthood for his exertions.

THE CLERK. The Mayor! Where do / come in?

AUGUSTUS. You dont come in. You go out. This is a fool of a place. I'm greatly disappointed. Deeply disappointed. [Flinging himself back into his chair] Disgusted.

THE CLERK. What more can we do? Weve shut up everything. The picture gallery is shut. The museum is shut. The theatres and picture shows is shut: I havnt seen a movy picture for six months.

AUGUSTUS. Man, man: do you wan t to see picture shows when the Hun is at the gate?

THE CLERK [mournfully] I dont now, though it drove me melancholy mad at first. I was on the point of taking a pennorth of rat poison

AUGUSTUS. Why didnt you?

THE CLERK. Because a friend advised me to take to drink instead. That saved my life, though it makes me very poor company in the mornings, as [hiccuping] perhaps youve noticed.

AUGUSTUS. Well, upon my soul! You are not ashamed to stand there and confess yourself a disgusting drunkard.

THE CLERK. Well, what of it? We're at war now; and everything's changed. Besides, I should lose my job here if I stood drinking at the bar. I'm a respectable man and must buy my drink and take it home with me. And they wont serve me with less than a quart. If youd told me before the war that I could get through a quart of whisky in a day, I shouldnt have believed you. Thats the good of war: it brings out powers in a man that he never suspected himself capable of. You said so yourself in your speech last night.

AUGUSTUS. I did not know that I was talking to an imbecile. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. There must be an end of this drunken slacking. I'm going to establish a new order of things here. I shall

come down every morning before breakfast until things are properly in train. Have a cup of coffee and two rolls for me here every morning at half-past ten.

THE CLERK. You cant have no rolls. The only baker that baked rolls was a Hun; and he's been interned.

AUGUSTUS. Quite right, too. And was there no Englishman to take his place?

THE CLERK. There was. But he was caught spying; and they took him up to London and shot him.

AUGUSTUS. Shot an Englishman!

THE CLERK. Well, it stands to reason if the Germans wanted a spy they wouldnt employ a German that everybody would suspect, dont it?

AUGUSTUS [rising again] Do you mean to say, you scoundrel, that an Englishman is capable of selling his country to the enemy for gold?

THE CLERK. Not as a general thing I wouldnt say it; but theres men here would sell their own mothers for two coppers if they got the chance.

AUGUSTUS. Beamish : it's an ill bird that fouls its own nest.

THE CLERK. It wasnt me that let Little Pifflington get foul. / dont belong to the governing classes. I only tell you why you cant have no rolls.

AUGUSTUS [intensely irritated] Can you tell me where I can find an intelligent being to take my orders?

THE CLERK. One of the street sweepers used to teach in the school until it was shut up for the sake of economy. Will he do?

AUGUSTUS. What! You mean to tell me that when the lives of the gallant fellows in our trenches, and the fate of the British Empire, depend on our keeping up the supply of shells, you are wasting money on sweeping the streets?

THE CLERK. We have to. We dropped it for a while; but the infant death rate went up something frightful.

AUGUSTUS. What matters the death rate of Little Pifflington in a moment like this? Think of our gallant soldiers, not of your squalling infants.

THE CLERK. If you want soldiers you must have children. You cant buy em in boxes, like toy soldiers.

AUGUSTUS. Beamish: the long and short of it is, you are no patriot. Go downstairs to your office; and have that gas stove taken away and replaced by an ordinary grate. The Board of Trade has urged on me the necessity for economizing gas.

THE CLERK. Our orders from the Minister of Munitions is to use gas instead of coal, because it saves

material. Which is it to be?

AUGUSTUS [bawlingfuriously at him] Both! Dont criticize your orders: obey them. Yours not to reason why: yours but to do and die. Thats war. [Cooling down] Have you anything else to say?

THE CLERK. Yes: I want a rise.

AUGUSTUS [reeling against the table in his horror] A rise! Horatio Floyd Beamish: do you know that we are at war?

THE CLERK [feebly ironical] I have noticed something about it in the papers. Heard you mention it once or twice, now I come to think of it.

AUGUSTUS. Our gallant fellows are dying in the trenches; and you want a rise!

THE CLERK. What are they dying for? To keep me alive, aint it? Well, whats the good of that if I'm dead of hunger by the time they come back?

AUGUSTUS. Everybody else is making sacrifices without a thought of self; and you

THE CLERK. Not half, they aint. Wheres the baker's sacrifice? Wheres the coal merchant's? Wheres the butcher's? Charging me double: thats how they sacrifice themselves. Well, I want to sacrifice myself that way too. Just double next Saturday: double and not a penny less; or no secretary for you [he stiffens himself shakily, and makes resolutely for the door].

AUGUSTUS [looking after him contemptuously] Go: miserable pro-German.

THE CLERK [rushing back and facing him] Who are you calling a pro-German?

AUGUSTUS. Another word, and I charge you under the Act with discouraging me. Go.

The clerk blenches and goes out, cowed.

The telephone rings.

AUGUSTUS [taking up the telephone receiver] Hallo... Yes: who are you?... oh, Blueloo, is it?... Yes: theres nobody in the room: fire away... What?... A spy!... A woman!... Yes: I brought it down with me. Do you suppose I'm such a fool as to let it out of my hands? Why, it gives a list of all our anti-aircraft emplacements from Ramsgate to Skegness. The Germans would give a million for it what?. -. But how could she possibly know about it? I havnt mentioned it to a soul, except, of course, dear Lucy.... Oh, Toto and Lady Popham and that lot: they dont count: theyre all right. I mean that I havnt mentioned it to any Germans... , Pooh! Dont you be nervous, old chap. I know you think me a fool; but I'm not such a fool as all that. If she tries to get it out of me I'll have her in the Tower before you ring up again. [The clerk returns]. Sh-sh! Somebody's just come in: ring off. Goodbye. [He hangs up the receiver].

THE CLERK. Are you engaged? [His manner is strangely softened].

AUGUSTUS. What business is that of yours? However, if you will take the trouble to read the society papers for this week, you will see that I am engaged to the Honorable Lucy Popham, youngest daughter

of

THE CLERK. That aint what I mean. Can you see a female?

AUGUSTUS. Of course I can see a female as easily as a male. Do you suppose I'm blind?

THE CLERK. You dont seem to follow me, somehow. Theres a female downstairs: what you might call a lady. She wants to know can you see her if I let her up.

AUGUSTUS. Oh, you mean am I disengaged. Tell the lady I have just received news of the greatest importance which will occupy my entire attention for the rest of the day, and that she must write for an appointment.

THE CLERK. I'll ask her to explain her business to me. 7 aint above talking to a handsome young female when I get the chance [going],

AUGUSTUS. Stop. Does she seem to be a person of consequence?

THE CLERK. A regular marchioness, if you ask me.

AUGUSTUS. Hm! Beautiful, did you say?

THE CLERK. A human chrysanthemum, sir, believe me.

AUGUSTUS. It will be extremely inconvenient for me to see her; but the country is in danger; and we must not consider our own comfort. Think how our gallant fellows are suffering in the trenches! Shew her up. [The clerk makes for the door, whistling the latest popular love ballad]^ Stop whistling instantly, sir. This is not a casino.

THE CLERK. Aint it? You just wait til you see her. [He goes out].

Augustus produces a mirror, a comb, and a pot of moustache pomade from the drawer of the writing-table , and sits down before the mirror to put some touches to his toilet.

The clerk returns, devotedly ushering a very attractive lady, brilliantly dressed. She has a dainty wallet hanging from her wrist. Augustus hastily covers up his toilet apparatus with The MorningPost, and rises in an attitude of pompous condescension.

THE CLERK [to Augustus] Here she is. [To the lady] May I offer you a chair, lady? [He places a chair at the writing-table opposite Augustus, and steals out on tiptoe].

AUGUSTUS. Be seated, madam.

THE LADY [sitting down] Are you Lord Augustus Highcastle?

AUGUSTUS [sitting also] Madam: I am.

THE LADY [with awe] The great Lord Augustus?

AUGUSTUS. I should not dream of describing myself so, madam; but no doubt I have impressed my countrymen and [bowing gallantly] may I say my countrywomen as having some exceptional claims to their consideration.

THE LADY [emotionally] What a beautiful voice you have!

AUGUSTUS. What you hear, madam, is the voice of my country, which now takes a sweet and noble tone even in the harsh mouth of high officialism.

THE LADY. Please go on. You express yourself so wonderfully!

AUGUSTUS. It would be strange indeed if, after sitting on thirty-seven Royal Commissions, mostly as chairman, I had not mastered the art of public expression. Even the Radical papers have paid me the high compliment of declaring that I am never more impressive than when I have nothing to say.

THE LADY. I never read the Radical papers. All I can tell you is that what we women admire in you is not the politician, but the man of action, the heroic warrior, the beau sabreur.

AUGUSTUS [gloomily] Madam, I beg! Please! My military exploits are not a pleasant subject, unhappily.

THE LADY. Oh, I know, I know. How shamefully you have been treated! What ingratitude! But the country is with you. The women are with you. Oh, do you think all our hearts did not throb and all our nerves thrill when we heard how, when you were ordered to occupy that terrible quarry in Hulluch, and you swept into it at the head of your men like a sea-god riding on a tidal wave, you suddenly sprang over the top shouting "To Berlin! Forward!"; dashed at the German army single-handed; and were cut off and made prisoner by the Huns.

AUGUSTUS. Yes, madam; and what was my reward? They said I had disobeyed orders, and sent me home. Have they forgotten Nelson in the Baltic? Has any British battle ever been won except by a bold individual initiative? I say nothing of professional jealousy: it exists in the army as elsewhere; but it is a bitter thought to me that the recognition denied me by my own country or rather by the Radical cabal in the Cabinet which pursues my family with rancorous class hatred that this recognition, I say, came to me at the hands of an enemy of a rank Prussian.

THE LADY. You dont say so!

AUGUSTUS. How else should I be here instead of starving to death in Ruhleben? Yes, madam: the Colonel of the Pomeranian regiment which captured me, after learning what I had done, and conversing for an hour with me on European politics and military strategy, declared that nothing would induce him to deprive my country of my services, and set me free. I offered, of course, to procure the release in exchange of a German officer of equal quality; but he would not hear of it. He was kind enough to say he could not believe that a German officer answering to that description existed. [With emotion] I had my first taste of the ingratitude of my own country as I made my way back to our lines. A shot from our front trench struck me in the head. I still carry the flattened projectile as a trophy [he throws it on the table: the noise it makes testifies to its weight]. Had it penetrated to the brain I might never have sat on another Royal Commission. Fortunately we have strong heads, we Highcastles. Nothing has ever penetrated to our brains.

THE LADY. How thrilling! How simple! And how tragic! But you will forgive England? Remember: England! Forgive her.

AUGUSTUS [with gloomy magnanimity] It will make no difference whatever to my services to my country. Though she slay me, yet will I, if not exactly trust in her, at least take my part in her government. I am ever at my country's call. Whether it be the embassy in a leading European capital, a governor-generalship in the tropics, or my humble mission here to make Little Pifflington do its bit, I am always ready for the sacrifice. Whilst England remains England, wherever there is a public job to be done you will find a Highcastle sticking to it. And now, madam, enough of my tragic personal history. You have called on business. What can I do for you?

THE LADY. You have relatives at the Foreign Office, have you not?

AUGUSTUS [haughtily] Madam: the Foreign Office is staffed by my relatives exclusively.

THE LADY. Has the Foreign Office warned you that you are being pursued by a female spy who is determined to obtain possession of a certain list of gun emplacements

AUGUSTUS [interrupting her somewhat loftily] All that is perfectly well known to this department, madam.

THE LADY [surprised and rather indignant] Is it? Who told you? Was it one of your German brothers-in-law?

AUGUSTUS [injured, remonstrating] I have only three German brothers-in-law, madam. Really, from your tone, one would suppose that I had several. Pardon my sensitiveness on that subject; but reports are continually being circulated that I have been shot as a traitor in the courtyard of the Rite Hotel simply because I have German brothers-in-law. [With feeling] If you had a German brother-in-law, madam, you would know that nothing else in the world produces so strong an anti-German feeling. Life affords no keener pleasure than finding a brother-in-law's name in the German casualty list.

THE LADY. Nobody knows that better than I. Wait until you hear what I have come to tell you: you will understand me as no one else could. Listen. This spy, this woman

AUGUSTUS [all attention] Yes?

THE LADY. She is a German. A Hun.

AUGUSTUS. Yes, yes. She would be. Continue.

THE LADY. She is my sister-in-law.

AUGUSTUS [deferentially] I see you are well connected, madam. Proceed.

THE LADY. Need I add that she is my bitterest enemy?

AUGUSTUS. May I [he proffers his hand. They shake, fervently. From this moment onward Augustus becomes more and more confidential, gallant, and charming

THE LADY. Quite so. Well, she is an intimate friend of your brother at the War Office, Hungerford Highcastle: Blueloo as you call him: I dont know why.

AUGUSTUS [explaining] He was originally called The Singing Oyster, because he sang drawing-room ballads with such an extraordinary absence of expression. He was then called the Blue Point for a season or two. Finally he became Blueloo.

THE LADY. Oh, indeed: I didnt know. Well, Blueloo is simply infatuated with my sister-in-law; and he has rashly let out to her that this list is in your possession. He forgot himself because he was in a towering rage at its being entrusted to you: his language was terrible. He ordered all the guns to be shifted at once.

AUGUSTUS. What on earth did he do that for?

THE LADY. I cant imagine. But this I know. She made a bet with him that she would come down here and obtain possession of that list and get clean away into the street with it. He took the bet on condition that she brought it straight back to him at the War Office.

AUGUSTUS. Good heavens! And you mean to tell me that Blueloo was such a dolt as to believe that she could succeed? Does he take me for a fool?

THE LADY. Oh, impossible! He is jealous of your intellect. The bet is an insult to you: dont you feel that? After what you have done for our country

AUGUSTUS. Oh, never mind that. It is the idiocy of the thing I look at. He'll lose his bet; and serve him right!

THE LADY. You feel sure you will be able to resist the siren? I warn you, she is very fascinating.

AUGUSTUS. You need have no fear, madam. I hope she will come and try it on. Fascination is a game that two can play at. For centuries the younger sons of the Highcastles have had nothing to do but fascinate attractive females when they were not sitting on Royal Commissions or on duty at Knightsbridge barracks. By Gad, madam, if the siren comes here she will meet her match.

THE LADY. I feel that. But if she fails to seduce you

AUGUSTUS [Mushing] Madam!

THE LADY [continuing] from your allegiance

AUGUSTUS. Oh, that!

THE LADY. she will resort to fraud, to force, to anything. She will burgle your office: she will have you attacked and garotted at night in the street.

AUGUSTUS. Pooh! I'm not afraid.

THE LADY. Oh, your courage will only tempt you into danger. She may get the list after all. It is true that the guns are moved. But she would win her bet.

AUGUSTUS [cautiously] You did not say that the guns were moved. You said that Blueloo had ordered them to be moved.

THE LADY. Well, that is the same thing, isnt it?

AUGUSTUS. Not quite at the War Office. No doubt those guns will be moved: possibly even before the end of the war.

THE LADY. Then you think they are there still! But if the German War Office gets the list and she will copy it before she gives it back to Blueloo, you may depend on it all is lost.

AUGUSTUS [lazily] Well, I should not go as far as that. [Lowering his voice] Will you swear to me not to repeat what I am going to say to you; for if the British public knew that I had said it, I should be at once hounded down as a pro-German.

THE LADY. I will be silent as the grave. I swear it. AUGUSTUS [again faking if easily] Well, our people have for some reason made up their minds that the German War Office is everything that our War Office is not that it carries promptitude, efficiency, and organization to a pitch of completeness and perfection that must be, in my opinion, destructive to the happiness of the staff. My own view which you are pledged, remember, not to betray is that the German War Office is no better than any other War Office. I found that opinion on my observation of the characters of my brothers-in-law: one of whom, by the way, is on the German general staff. I am not at all sure that this list of gun emplacements would receive the smallest attention. You see, there are always so many more important things to be attended to. Family matters, and so on, you understand.

THE LADY. Still, if a question were asked in the House of Commons

AUGUSTUS. The great advantage of being at war, madam, is that nobody takes the slightest notice of the House of Commons. No doubt it is sometimes necessary for a Minister to soothe the more seditious members of that assembly by giving a pledge or two; but the War Office takes no notice of such things.

THE LADY. Then you think this list of gun emplacements doesnt matter!!

AUGUSTUS. By no means, madam. It matters very much indeed. If this spy were to obtain possession of the list, Blueloo would tell the story at every dinner-table in London, And...

THE LADY. And you might lose your post. Of course.

AUGUSTUS [amazed and indignant] I lose my post! What are you dreaming about, madam? How could I possibly be spared? There are hardly Highcastles enough at present to fill half the posts created by this war. No: Blueloo would not go that far. He is at least a gentleman. But I should be chaffed; and, frankly, I dont like being chaffed.

THE LADY. Of course not. Who does? It would never do. Oh never, never.

AUGUSTUS. I'm glad you see it in that light. And now, as a measure of security, I shall put that list in my pocket. [He begins searching vainly from drawer to drawer in the writing-table]. Where on earth? What the dickens did I? Thats very odd: I Where the deuce? I thought I had put it in the Oh, here it is!

No : this is Lucy's last letter.

THE LADY [elegiacally] Lucy's Last Letter! What a title for a picture play!

AUGUSTUS [delighted] Yes: it is, isn't it? Lucy appeals to the imagination like no other woman. By the way [handing over the letter] I wonder could you read it for me? Lucy is a darling girl; but I really can't read her writing. In London I get the office typist to decipher it and make me a typed copy; but here there is nobody.

THE LADY [puzzling over it] It is really almost illegible. I think the beginning is meant for "Dearest Gus."

AUGUSTUS [eagerly] Yes : that is what she usually calls me. Please go on.

THE LADY [trying to decipher it] "What a" "what a" oh yes: "what a forgetful old" something "you are!" I can't make out the word.

AUGUSTUS [greatly interested] Is it blighter? That is a favorite expression of hers.

THE LADY. I think so. At all events it begins with a B. [Reading "What a forgetful old" [she is interrupted by a knock at the door],

AUGUSTUS [impatiently] Come in. [The clerk enters, clean shaven and in khaki with an official paper and an envelope in his hand]. What is this ridiculous mummery, sir?

THE CLERK [coming to the table and exhibiting his uniform to both] They've passed me. The recruiting officer came for me. I've had my two and seven.

AUGUSTUS [rising wrathfully] I shall not permit it. What do they mean by taking my office staff? Good God! they will be taking our hunt servants next. [Confronting the clerk] What did the man mean? What did he say?

THE CLERK. He said that now you was on the job we'd want another million men, and he was going to take the old-age pensioners or anyone he could get.

AUGUSTUS. And did you dare to knock at my door and interrupt my business with this lady to repeat this man's ineptitudes?

THE CLERK. No. I come because the waiter from the hotel brought this paper. You left it on the coffee-room breakfast-table this morning.

THE LADY [intercepting it] It is the list. Good heavens!

THE CLERK [proffering the envelope] He says he thinks this is the envelope belonging to it.

THE LADY [snatching the envelope also] Yes! Addressed to you. Lord Augustus! [Augustus comes back to the table to look at it] Oh, how imprudent! Everybody would guess its importance with your name on it. Fortunately I have some letters of my own here [opening her wallet]. Why not hide it in one of my envelopes? then no one will dream that the enclosure is of any political value. [Taking out a

letter^ she crosses the room towards the window, whispering to Augustus as she passes him] Get rid of that man.

AUGUSTUS [haughtily approaching the clerk, who humorously makes a paralytic attempt to stand at attention] Have you any further business here, pray?

THE CLERK. Am I to give the waiter anything; or will you do it yourself?

AUGUSTUS. Which waiter is it? The English one?

THE CLERK. No: the one that calls himself a Swiss. Shouldnt wonder if he'd made a copy of that paper.

AUGUSTUS. Keep your impertinent surmises to yourself, sir. Remember that you are in the army now; and let me have no more of your civilian insubordination. Attention! Left turn! Quick march!

THE CLERK [stolidly] I dunno what you mean.

AUGUSTUS. Go to the guard-room and report yourself for disobeying orders. Now do you know what I mean?

THE CLERK. Now look here. I aint going to argue with you

AUGUSTUS. Nor I with you. Out with you.

He seizes the clerk; and rushes him through the door. The moment the lady is left alone > she snatches a sheet of official paper from the stationery rack; folds it so that it resembles the list; compares the two to see that they look exactly alike; whips the list into her wallet; and substitutes the facsimile for it. Then she listens for the return of Augustus. A crash is heard, as of the clerk falling downstairs.

Augustus returns and is about to close the door when the voice of the clerk is heard from below:

THE CLERK. I'll have the law of you for this, I will.

AUGUSTUS [shouting down to him] Theres no more law for you, you scoundrel. Youre a soldier now. [He shuts the door and comes to the lady]. Thank heaven, the war has given us the upper hand of these fellows at last. Excuse my violence; but discipline is absolutely necessary in dealing with the lower middle classes.

THE LADY. Serve the insolent creature right! Look! I have found you a beautiful envelope for the list, an unmistakable lady's envelope. [She puts the sham list into her envelope and hands it to him],

AUGUSTUS. Excellent. Really very clever of you. [Slyly] Come: would you like to have a peep at the list [beginning to take the blank paper from the envelope]?

THE LADY [in the brink of detection] No no. Oh, please, no.

AUGUSTUS. Why Pit wont bite you [drawing it out further].

THE LADY [snatching at his hand] Stop. Remember: if there should be an inquiry, you must be able to

swear that you never shewed that list to a mortal soul.

AUGUSTUS. Oh, that is a mere form. If you are really curious

THE LADY. I am not. I couldn't bear to look at it. One of my dearest friends was blown to pieces by an aircraft gun; and since then I have never been able to think of one without horror.

AUGUSTUS. You mean it was a real gun, and actually went off. How sad! how sad! [He pushes the sham list back into the envelope, and pockets it].

THE LADY. Ah! [great sigh of relief]. And now, Lord Augustus, I have taken up too much of your valuable time. Goodbye.

AUGUSTUS. What! Must you go?

THE LADY. You are so busy.

AUGUSTUS. Yes; but not before lunch, you know. I never can do much before lunch. And I'm no good at all in the afternoon. From five to six is my real working time. Must you really go?

THE LADY. I must, really. I have done my business very satisfactorily. Thank you ever so much [she proffers her hand].

AUGUSTUS [shaking it affectionately as he leads her to the door, but first pressing the bell button with his left hand] Goodbye. Goodbye. So sorry to lose you. Kind of you to come; but there was no real danger. You see, my dear little lady, all this talk about war saving, and secrecy, and keeping the blinds down at night, and so forth, is all very well; but unless it's carried out with intelligence, believe me, you may waste a pound to save a penny; you may let out all sorts of secrets to the enemy; you may guide the Zeppelins right on to your own chimneys. That's where the ability of the governing class comes in. Shall the fellow call a taxi for you?

THE LADY. No, thanks: I prefer walking. Goodbye. Again, many, many thanks.

She goes out. Augustus returns to the writing-table smiling, and takes another look at himself in the mirror. The clerk returns with his head bandaged^ carrying a poker.

THE CLERK. What did you ring for? [Augustus hastily drops the mirror]. Don't you come nigh me or I'll split your head with this poker, thick as it is.

AUGUSTUS. It does not seem to me an exceptionally thick poker. I rang for you to shew the lady out.

THE CLERK. She's gone. She run out like a rabbit. I ask myself, why was she in such a hurry?

THE LADY'S VOICE [from the street] Lord Augustus. Lord Augustus.

THE CLERK. She's calling you.

AUGUSTUS [running to the window and throwing it up] What is it? Won't you come up?

THE LADY. Is the clerk there?

AUGUSTUS. Yes. Do you want him?

THE LADY. Yes.

AUGUSTUS. The lady wants you at the window.

THE CLERK, [rushing to the window and putting down the poker] Yes, maam? Here I am, maam. What is it, maam?

THE LADY. I want you to witness that I got clean away into the street. I am coming up now.

The two men stare at one another.

THE CLERK. Wants me to witness that she got clean away into the street!

AUGUSTUS. What on earth does she mean?

The lady returns.

THE LADY. May I use your telephone?

AUGUSTUS. Certainly. Certainly. [Taking the receiver down] What number shall I get you?

THE LADY. The War Office, please.

AUGUSTUS. The War Office!?

THE LADY. If you will be so good.

AUGUSTUS. But Oh, very well. [Into the receiver] Hallo. This is the Town Hall Recruiting Office. Give me Colonel Bogey, sharp.

A pause.

THE CLERK [breaking the painful silence] I dont think Im awake. This is a dream of a movy picture, this is.

AUGUSTUS [his ear at the receiver] Shut up, will you? [Into the telephone] What?...[T0 the lady] Whom do you want to get on to?

THE LADY. BlueloO.

AUGUSTUS [into the telephone] Put me through to Lord

Hungerford Highcastle I'm his brother, idiot That

you, Blueloo? Lady here at Little Pifflington wants to speak to you. Hold the line. [To the lady] Now,

madam [he hands her the receiver].

THE LADY [sifting down in Augustus's chair to speak into the telephone] Is that Blueloo?...Do you recognize my voice?... I ve won our bet

AUGUSTUS. Your bet!

THE LADY [into the telephone] Yes: I have the list in my wallet....

AUGUSTUS. Nothing of the kind, madam. I have it here in my pocket. [He takes the envelope from his pocket; draws out the paper; and unfolds it].

THE LADY [continuing] Yes: I got clean into the street with it. I have a witness. I could have got to London with it. Augustus wont deny it... ,

AUGUSTUS [contemplating the blank paper] Theres nothing written on this. Where is the list of guns?

THE LADY [continuing Oh, it was quite easy. I said I was my sister-in-law and that I was a Hun. He lapped it up like a kitten

AUGUSTUS. You dont mean to say that

THE LADY [continuing I got hold of the list for a moment and changed it for a piece of paper out of his stationery rack: it was quite easy [she laughs; and it is clear that Blueloo is laughing too].

AUGUSTUS. What!

THE CLERK [laughing slowly and laboriously, with intense enjoyment] Ha ha! Ha ha ha! Ha!
[Augustus rushes at him: he snatches up the poker and stands on guard]. No you dont.

THE LADY [still at the telephone y waving her disengaged hand behind her impatiently at them to stop making a noise] Sh-sh-sh-sh-sh!!! [Augustus > with a shrug, goes up the middle of the room. The lady resumes her conversation with the telephone] What?... Oh yes: I'm coming up by the 12.35: why not have tea with me at Rumpelmeister's?... Rum-pelmeister's. You know: they call it Robinson's now.... Right. Ta ta. [She hangs up the receiver, and is passing round the table on her way towards the door when she is confronted by Augustus].

AUGUSTUS. Madam: I consider your conduct most unpatriotic. You make bets and abuse the confidence of the hardworked officials who are doing their bit for their country whilst our gallant fellows are perishing in the trenches

THE LADY. Oh, the gallant fellows are not all in the trenches, Augustus. Some of them have come home for a few days hard-earned leave; and I am sure you wont grudge them a little fun at your expense.

THE CLERK. Hear! Hear!

AUGUSTUS [amiably] Ah, well! For my country's sake!

THE INCA OF PERUSALEM

AN ALMOST HISTORICAL COMEDIETTA

I MUST remind the reader that this playlet was written when its principal character, far from being a fallen foe and virtually a prisoner in our victorious hands, was still the Caesar whose legions we were resisting with our hearts in our mouths. Many were so horribly afraid of him that they could not forgive me for not being afraid of him: I seemed to be trifling heartlessly with a deadly peril. I knew better; and I have represented Caesar as knowing better himself. But it was one of the quaintnesses of popular feeling during the war that anyone who breathed the slightest doubt of the absolute perfection of German organization, the Machiavellian depth of German diplomacy, the omniscience of German science, the equipment of every German with a complete philosophy of history, and the consequent hopelessness of overcoming so magnificently accomplished an enemy except by the sacrifice of every recreative activity to incessant and vehement war work, including a heartbreaking mass of fussing and cadging and bluffing that did nothing but waste our energies and tire our resolution, was called a pro-German.

Now that this is all over, and the upshot of the fighting has shewn that we could quite well have afforded to laugh at the doomed Inca, I am in another difficulty. I may be supposed to be hitting Caesar when he is down. That is why I preface the play with this reminder that when it was written he was not down. To make quite sure, I have gone through the proof sheets very carefully, and deleted everything that could possibly be mistaken for a foul blow. I have of course maintained the ancient privilege of comedy to chasten Caesar's foibles by laughing at them, whilst introducing enough obvious and outrageous fiction to relieve both myself and my model from the obligations and responsibilities of sober history and biography. But I should certainly put the play in the fire instead of publishing it if it contained a word against our defeated enemy that I would not have written in 1913.

The Inca of Perusalem was performed for the first time in England by the Pioneer Players at the Criterion Theatre, London, on 16th December 1917, with Gertrude Kingston as Ermyntrude, Helen Morris as the Princess, Nigel Playfair as the waiter, Alfred Drayton as the hotel-manager, C. Wordley Hulse as the Archdeacon, and Randle Ayrton as the Inca.

PROLOGUE

The tableau curtains are closed. An English archdeacon comes through them in a condition of extreme irritation. He speaks through the curtains to someone behind them.

THE ARCHDEACON. Once for all, Ermyntrude, I cannot afford to maintain you in your present extravagance. [He goes to a flight of steps leading to the stalls and sits down disconsolately on the top step. A fashionably dressed lady comes through the curtains and contemplates him with patient obstinacy. He continues, grumbling.] An English clergyman's daughter should be able to live quite respectably and comfortably on an allowance of 150 a year, wrung with great difficulty from the domestic budget.

ERMYNTRUDE. You are not a common clergyman: you are an archdeacon.

THE ARCHDEACON [angrily] That does not affect my emoluments to the extent of enabling me to

support a daughter whose extravagance would disgrace a royal personage. [Scrambling to his feet and scolding at her] What do you mean by it, Miss?

ERMYNTRUDE. Oh really, father! Miss! Is that the way to talk to a widow?

THE ARCHDEACON. Is that the way to talk to a father? Your marriage was a most disastrous imprudence. It gave you habits that are absolutely beyond your means I mean beyond my means: you have no means. Why did you not marry Matthews: the best curate I ever had?

ERMYNTRUDE. I wanted to; and you wouldnt let me. You insisted on my marrying Roosenhonkers-Pipstein.

THE ARCHDEACON. I had to do the best for you, my child Roosenhonkers-Pipstein was a millionaire.

ERMYNTRUDE. How did you know he was a millionaire?

THE ARCHDEACON. He came from America. Of course he was a millionaire. Besides, he proved to my solicitors that he had fifteen million dollars when you married him.

ERMYNTRUDE. His solicitors proved to me that he had sixteen millions when he died. He was a millionaire to the last.

THE ARCHDEACON. O Mammon, Mammon! I am punished now for bowing the knee to him. Is there nothing left of your settlement? Fifty thousand dollars a year it secured to you, as we all thought. Only half the securities could be called speculative. The other half were gilt-edged. What has become of it all?

ERMYNTRUDE. The speculative ones were not paid up; and the gilt-edged ones just paid the calls on them until the whole show burst up.

THE ARCHDEACON. Ermyntrude: what expressions!

ERMYNTRUDE. Oh bother! If you had lost ten thousand a year what expressions would you use, do you think? The long and the short of it is that I cant live in the squalid way you are accustomed to.

THE ARCHDEACON. Squalid!

ERMYNTRUDE. I have formed habits of comfort.

THE ARCHDEACON. Comfort!!

ERMYNTRUDE. Well, elegance if you like. Luxury, if you insist. Call it what you please. A house that costs less than a hundred thousand dollars a year to run is intolerable to me.

THE ARCHDEACON. Then, my dear, you had better become lady's maid to a princess until you can find another millionaire to marry you.

ERMYNTRUDE. Thats an idea. I will [She vanishes through the curtains].

THE ARCHDEACON. What! Come back, Miss. Come back this instant. [The lights are lowered]. Oh, very well: I have nothing more to say. [He descends the steps into the auditorium and makes for the door, grumbling all the time]. Insane, senseless extravagance! [Barking] Worthlessness!! [Muttering] I will not bear it any longer. Dresses, hats, furs, gloves, motor rides: one bill after another: money going like water. No restraint, no self-control, no decency. [Shrieking I say, no decency! [Muttering again] Nice state of things we are coming to! A pretty world! But I simply will not bear it. She can do as she likes. I wash my hands of her: I am not going to die in the workhouse for any good-for-nothing, undutiful, spendthrift daughter; and the sooner that is understood by everybody the better for all par [He is by this time out of hearing in the corridor].

THE PLAY

A hotel sitting room. A table in the centre. On it a telephone. Two chairs at it, opposite one another. Behind it, the door. The fireplace has a mirror in the mantelpiece.

A spinster Princess, hatted and gloved, is ushered in by the Hotel Manager, spruce and artificially bland by professional habit, but treating his customer with a condescending affability which sails very close to the east wind of insolence.

THE MANAGER. I am sorry I am unable to accommodate Your Highness on the first floor.

THE PRINCESS [very shy and nervous] Oh please dont mention it. This is quite nice. Very nice. Thank you very much.

THE MANAGER. We could prepare a room in the annexe

THE PRINCESS. Oh no. This will do very well.

She takes off her gloves and hat; puts them on the table; and sits down.

THE MANAGER. The rooms are quite as good up here. There is less noise; and there is the lift. If your Highness desires anything, there is the telephone

THE PRINCESS. Oh, thank you, I dont want anything. The telephone is so difficult: I am not accustomed to it.

THE MANAGER. Can I take any order? Some tea?

THE PRINCESS.^, thank you. Yes: I should like some tea, if I might if it would not be too much trouble.

He goes out. The telephone rings. The Princess starts out of her chair, terrified, and recoils as far as possible from the instrument.

THE PRINCESS. Oh dear! [It rings again. She looks scared. It rings again. She approaches it timidly. It rings again. She retreats hastily. It rings repeatedly. She runs to it in desperation and puts the receiver to her ear]. Who is there? What do I do? I am not used to the telephone: I dont know how What! Oh, I can hear you speaking quite distinctly. [She sits down, delighted, and settles herself for a conversation].

How wonderful! What! A lady? Oh! a person. Oh yes: I know. Yes, please, send her up. Have my servants finished their lunch yet? Oh no: please dont disturb them: I'd rather not. It doesnt matter. Thank you. What? Oh yes, it's quite easy. I had no idea am I to hang it up just as it was? Thank you. [She hangs it up].

Ermyntrude enters, presenting a plain and staid appearance in a long straight waterproof with a hood over her head gear. She comes to the end of the table opposite to that at which the Princess is seated.

THE PRINCESS. Excuse me. I have been talking through the telephone; and I heard quite well, though I have never ventured before. Wont you sit down?

ERMYNTRUDE. No, thank you, Your Highness. I am only a lady's maid. I understood you wanted one.

THE PRINCESS. Oh no: you mustnt think I want one. It's so unpatriotic to want anything now, on account of the war, you know. I sent my maid away as a public duty; and now she has married a soldier and is expecting a war baby. But I dont know how to do without her. Ive tried my very best; but somehow it doesnt answer: everybody cheats me; and in the end it isnt any saving. So Ive made up my mind to sell my piano and have a maid. That will be a real saving, because I really dont care a bit for music, though of course one has to pretend to. Dont you think so?

ERMYNTRUDE. Certainly I do, Your Highness. Nothing could be more correct. Saving and self-denial both at once; and an act of kindness to me, as I am out of place.

THE PRINCESS. Fm so glad you see it in that way. Er you wont mind my asking, will you? how did you lose your place?

ERMYNTRUDE. The war, Your Highness, the war.

THE PRINCESS. Oh yes, of course. But how

ERMYNTRUDE [taking out her handkerchief and shewing signs of grief] My poor mistress

THE PRINCESS. Oh p l e a s e say no more. Dont think about it. So tactless of me to mention it.

ERMYNTRUDE [mastering her emotion and smiling through her tears] Your Highness is too good.

THE PRINCESS. Do you think you could be happy with me? I attach such importance to that.

ERMYNTRUDE [gushing] Oh, I know I shall.

THE PRINCESS. You must not expect too much. There is my uncle. He is very severe and hasty; and he is my guardian. I once had a maid I liked very much; but he sent her away the very first time.

ERMYNTRUDE. The first time of what, Your Highness?

THE PRINCESS. Oh, something she did. I am sure she had never done it before; and I k n o w she would never have done it again, she was so truly contrite and nice about it.

ERMYNTRUDE. About what, Your Highness?

THE PRINCESS. Well, she wore my jewels and one of my dresses at a rather improper ball with her young man; and my uncle saw her.

ERMYNTRUDE. Then he was at the ball too, Your Highness?

THE PRINCESS \struck by the inference^ I suppose he must have been. I wonder! You know, it's very sharp of you to find that out. I hope you are not too sharp.

ERMYNTRUDE. A lady's maid has to be. Your Highness. [She produces some letters]. Your Highness wishes to see my testimonials, no doubt. I have one from an Archdeacon. [She proffers the letters].

THE PRINCESS [taking them] Do archdeacons have maids? How curious!

ERMYNTRUDE. No, Your Highness. They have daughters. I have first-rate testimonials from the Archdeacon and from his daughter.

THE PRINCESS [reading them] The daughter says you are in every respect a treasure. The Archdeacon says he would have kept you if he could possibly have afforded it. Most satisfactory, I'm sure.

ERMYNTRUDE. May I regard myself as engaged then, Your Highness?

THE PRINCESS [alarmed] Oh, I'm sure I don't know. If you like, of course; but do you think I ought to?

ERMYNTRUDE. Naturally I think Your Highness ought to, most decidedly.

THE PRINCESS. Oh well, if you think that, I daresay you're quite right. You'll excuse my mentioning it, I hope; but what wages are?

ERMYNTRUDE. The same as the maid who went to the ball. Your Highness need not make any change.

THE PRINCESS. M'yes. Of course she began with less. But she had such a number of relatives to keep! It was quite heartbreaking: I had to raise her wages again and again.

ERMYNTRUDE. I shall be quite content with what she began on; and I have no relatives dependent on me. And I am willing to wear my own dresses at balls.

THE PRINCESS. I am sure nothing could be fairer than that. My uncle can't object to that: can he?

ERMYNTRUDE. If he does, Your Highness, ask him to speak to me about it. I shall regard it as part of my duties to speak to your uncle about matters of business.

THE PRINCESS. Would you? You must be frightfully courageous.

ERMYNTRUDE. May I regard myself as engaged. Your Highness? I should like to set about my duties immediately.

THE PRINCESS. Oh yes, I think so. Oh certainly. I

A waiter comes in with the tea. He places the tray on the table.

THE PRINCESS. Oh, thank you.

ERMYNTRUDE [raising the cover from the tea cake and looking at it] How long has that been standing at the top of the stairs?

THE PRINCESS [terrified] Oh please! It doesn't matter.

THE WAITER. It has not been waiting. Straight from the kitchen, madam, believe me.

ERMYNTRUDE. Send the manager here.

THE WAITER. The manager! What do you want with the manager?

ERMYNTRUDE. He will tell you when I have done with him. How dare you treat Her Highness in this disgraceful manner? What sort of pothouse is this? Where did you learn to speak to persons of quality? Take away your cold tea and cold cake instantly. Give them to the chambermaid you were flirting with whilst Her Highness was waiting. Order some fresh tea at once; and do not presume to bring it yourself: have it brought by a civil waiter who is accustomed to wait on ladies, and not, like you, on commercial travellers.

THE WAITER. Alas, madam, I am not accustomed to wait on anybody. Two years ago I was an eminent medical man. My waiting-room was crowded with the flower of the aristocracy and the higher bourgeoisie from nine to six every day. But the war came; and my patients were ordered to give up their luxuries. They gave up their doctors, but kept their week-end hotels, closing every career to me except the career of a waiter. [He puts his fingers on the teapot to test its temperature, and automatically takes out his watch with the other hand as if to count the teapot's pulse]. You are right: the tea is cold: it was made by the wife of a once fashionable architect. The cake is only half toasted: what can you expect from a ruined west-end tailor whose attempt to establish a second-hand business failed last Tuesday week? Have you the heart to complain to the manager? Have we not suffered enough? Are our miseries nev... [the manager enters] Oh Lord! here he is. [The waiter withdraws abjectly, taking the tea tray with him].

THE MANAGER. Pardon, Your Highness; but I have received an urgent inquiry for rooms from an English family of importance; and I venture to ask you to let me know how long you intend to honor us with your presence.

THE PRINCESS [rising anxiously] Oh! am I in the way?

ERMYNTRUDE [sternly] Sit down, madam. [The Princess sits down forlornly. Ermyntrude turns imperiously to the Manager]. Her Highness will require this room for twenty minutes.

THE MANAGER. Twenty minutes!

ERMYNTRUDE. Yes: it will take fully that time to find a proper apartment in a respectable hotel.

THE MANAGER. I do not understand.

ERMYNTRUDE. You understand perfectly. How dare you offer Her Highness a room on the second floor?

THE MANAGER. But I have explained. The first floor is occupied. At least...

ERMYNTRUDE. Well? At least?

THE MANAGER. It is Occupied.

ERMYNTRUDE. Dont you dare tell Her Highness a falsehood. It is not occupied. You are saving it up for the arrival of the five fifteen express, from which you hope to pick up some fat armaments contractor who will drink all the bad champagne in your cellar at 25 francs a bottle, and pay twice over for everything because he is in the same hotel with Her Highness, and can boast of having turned her out of the best rooms.

THE MANAGER. But Her Highness was so gracious. I did not know that Her Highness was at all particular.

ERMYNTRUDE. And you take advantage of Her Highness's graciousness. You impose on her with your stories. You give her a room not fit for a dog. You send cold tea to her by a decayed professional person disguised as a waiter. But dont think you can trifle with me. I am a lady's maid; and I know the ladies' maids and valets of all the aristocracies of Europe and all the millionaires of America. When I expose your hotel as the second-rate little hole it is, not a soul above the rank of a curate with a large family will be seen entering it. I shake its dust off my feet. Order the luggage to be taken down at once.

THE MANAGER [appealing to the Princess] Can Your Highness believe this of me? Have I had the misfortune to offend Your Highness?

THE PRINCESS. Oh no. I am quite satisfied. Please

ERMYNTRUDE. Is Your Highness dissatisfied with m e?

THE PRINCESS [intimidated\ Oh no: please dont think that. I only meant

ERMYNTRUDE [to the Manager] You hear. Perhaps you think Her Highness is going to do the work of teaching you your place herself, instead of leaving it to her maid.

THE MANAGER. Oh please, mademoiselle. Believe me: our only wish is to make you perfectly comfortable. But in consequence of the war, all royal personages now practise a rigid economy, and desire us to treat them like their poorest subjects.

THE PRINCESS. Oh yes, You are quite right

ERMYNTRUDE [interrupting There! Her Highness forgives you; but dont do it again. Now go downstairs, my good man, and get that suite on the first floor ready for us. And send some proper tea. And turn on the heating apparatus until the temperature in the rooms is comfortably warm. And have

hot water put in all the bedrooms

THE MANAGER. There are basins with hot and cold taps.

ERMYNTRUDE [scornfully] Yes: there would be. I suppose we must put up with that: sinks in our rooms, and pipes that rattle and bang and guggle all over the house whenever anyone washes his hands. I know.

THE MANAGER [gallant] You are hard to please, mademoiselle.

ERMYNTRUDE. No harder than other people. But when I'm not pleased I'm not too ladylike to say so. That's all the difference. There is nothing more, thank you.

The Manager shrugs his shoulders resignedly; makes a deep bow to the Princess; goes to the door; wafts a kiss surreptitiously to Ermyntrude; and goes out.

THE PRINCESS. It's wonderful! How have you the courage?

ERMYNTRUDE. In Your Highness's service I know no fear. Your Highness can leave all unpleasant people to me.

THE PRINCESS. How I wish I could! The most dreadful thing of all I have to go through myself.

ERMYNTRUDE. Dare I ask what it is, Your Highness?

THE PRINCESS. I'm going to be married. I'm to be met here and married to a man I never saw. A boy! A boy who never saw me! One of the sons of the Inca of Perusalem.

ERMYNTRUDE. Indeed? Which son?

THE PRINCESS. I don't know. They haven't settled which. It's a dreadful thing to be a princess: they just marry you to anyone they like. The Inca is to come and look at me, and pick out whichever of his sons he thinks will suit. And then I shall be an alien enemy everywhere except in Perusalem, because the Inca has made war on everybody. And I shall have to pretend that everybody has made war on him. It's too bad.

ERMYNTRUDE. Still, a husband is a husband. I wish I had one.

THE PRINCESS. Oh, how can you say that! I'm afraid you're not a nice woman.

ERMYNTRUDE. Your Highness is provided for. I'm not.

THE PRINCESS. Even if you could bear to let a man touch you, you shouldn't say so.

ERMYNTRUDE. I shall not say so again, Your Highness, except perhaps to the man.

THE PRINCESS. It's too dreadful to think of. I wonder you can be so coarse. I really don't think you'll suit. I feel sure now that you know more about men than you should.

ERMYNTRUDE. I am a widow, Your Highness.

THE PRINCESS [overwhelmed] Oh, I BEG your pardon. Of course I ought to have known you would not have spoken like that if you were not married. That makes it all right> doesnt it? I'm so sorry.

The Manager returns, white, scared, hardly able to speak.

THE MANAGER. Your Highness: an officer asks to see you on behalf of the Inca of Perusalem.

THE PRINCESS [rising distractedly] Oh, I cant, really. Oh, what shall I do?

THE MANAGER. On important business, he says, Your Highness. Captain Duval.

ERMYNTRUDE. Duval! Nonsense! The usual thing. It is the Inca himself, incognito.

THE PRINCESS. Oh, send him away. Oh, I'm so afraid of the Inca. I'm not properly dressed to receive him; and he is so particular: he would order me to stay in my room for a week. Tell him to call tomorrow: say I'm ill in bed. I cant: I wont: I darent: you must get rid of him somehow.

ERMYNTRUDE. Leave him to me, Your Highness.

THE PRINCESS. Youd never dare!

ERMYNTRUDE. I am an Englishwoman, Your Highness, and perfectly capable of tackling ten Incas if necessary. I will arrange the matter. [To the Manager] Shew Her Highness to her bedroom; and then shew Captain Duval in here.

THE PRINCESS. Oh thank you so much. [She goes to the door. Ermyntrude, noticing that she has left her hat and gloves on the table, runs after her with them]. Oh, thank you. And oh, please, if I must have one of his sons, I should like a fair one that doesnt shave, with soft hair and a beard. I couldnt bear being kissed by a bristly person. [She runs out, the Manager bowing as she passes. He follows her].

Ermyntrude whips of her waterproof; hides it; and gets herself swiftly into perfect trim at the mirror, before the Manager, with a large jewel case in his hand, returns, ushering in the Inca.

THE MANAGER. Captain Duval.

The Inca, in military uniform, advances with a marked and imposing stage walk; stops; orders the trembling Manager by a gesture to place the jewel case on the table, dismisses him with a frown; touches his helmet graciously to Ermyntrude; and takes off his cloak.

THE INCA. I beg you, madam, to be quite at your ease, and to speak to me without ceremony,

ERMYNTRUDE [moving haughtily and carelessly to the table] I hadnt the slightest intention of treating you with ceremony. [She sits down: a liberty > which gives him a perceptible shock]. I am quite at a loss to imagine why I should treat a perfect stranger named Duval : a captain! almost a subaltern! with the smallest ceremony.

THE INCA. That is true. I had for the moment forgotten my position.

ERMYNTRUDE. It doesnt matter. You may sit down.

THE INCA [frowning] What!

ERMYNTRUDE. I said, you... may... sit... down.

THE INCA. Oh. [His moustache droops. He sits down].

ERMYNTRUDE. What is your business?

THE INCA. I come on behalf of the Inca of Perusalem.

ERMYNTRUDE. The Allerhochst?

THE INCA. Precisely.

ERMYNTRUDE. I wonder does he feel ridiculous when people call him the Allerhochst.

THE INCA [surprised] Why should he? He is the Allerhochst.

ERMYNTRUDE. Is he nice looking?

THE INCA. I er. Er I. I er. I am not a good judge.

ERMYNTRUDE. They say he takes himself very seriously.

THE INCA. Why should he not, madam? Providence has entrusted to his family the care of a mighty empire. He is in a position of half divine, half paternal responsibility towards sixty millions of people, whose duty it is to die for him at the word of command. To take himself otherwise than seriously would be blasphemous. It is a punishable offence severely punishable in Perusalem. It is called Incadisparagement.

ERMYNTRUDE. How cheerful! Can he laugh?

THE INCA. Certainly, madam. [He laughs, harshly and mirthlessly.] Ha ha! Ha ha ha!

ERMYNTRUDE [Frigidly] I asked could the Inca laugh. I did not ask could you laugh.

THE INCA. That is true, madam. [Chuckling.] Devilish amusing, that! [He laughs, genially and sincerely, and becomes a much more agreeable person]. Pardon me: I am now laughing because I cannot help it. I am amused. The other was merely an imitation: a failure, I admit.

ERMYNTRUDE. You intimated that you had some business?

THE INCA [producing a very large jewel case, and relapsing into solemnity\ I am instructed by the Allerhochst to take a careful note of your features and figure, and, if I consider them satisfactory, to present you with this trifling token of His Imperial Majesty's regard. I do consider them satisfactory. Allow me [he opens the jewel case and presents it] \

ERMYNTRUDE [staring at the contents] What awful taste he must have! I can't wear that.

THE INCA [reddening] Take care, madam! This brooch was designed by the Inca himself. Allow me to explain the design. In the centre, the shield of Arminius. The ten surrounding medallions represent the ten castles of His Majesty. The rim is a piece of the telephone cable laid by His Majesty across the Shipkeel Canal. The pin is a model in miniature of the sword of Henry the Birdcatcher.

ERMYNTRUDE. Miniature! It must be bigger than the original. My good man, you don't expect me to wear this round my neck: it's as big as a turtle. [He shuts the case with an angry snap]. How much did it cost?

THE INCA. For materials and manufacture alone, half a million Perusalem dollars, madam. The Inca's design constitutes it a work of art. As such, it is now worth probably ten million dollars.

ERMYNTRUDE. Give it to me [she snatches it]. I'll pawn it and buy something nice with the money.

THE INCA. Impossible, madam. A design by the Inca must not be exhibited for sale in the shop window of a pawnbroker. [He flings himself into his chair, fuming].

ERMYNTRUDE. So much the better. The Inca will have to redeem it to save himself from that disgrace; and the poor pawnbroker will get his money back. Nobody would buy it, you know.

THE INCA. May I ask why?

ERMYNTRUDE. Well, look at it! Just look at it! I ask you!

THE INCA [his moustache drooping ominously] I am sorry to have to report to the Inca that you have no soul for fine art. [He rises sulkily]. The position of daughter-in-law to the Inca is not compatible with the tastes of a pig. [He attempts to take back the brooch].

ERMYNTRUDE [rising and retreating behind her chair with the brooch] Here! you let that brooch done. You presented it to me on behalf of the Inca. It is mine. You said my appearance was satisfactory, no?

THE INCA, Your appearance is not satisfactory. The Inca would not allow his son to marry you if the boy were on a desert island and you were the only other human being on it [he strides up the room].

ERMYNTRUDE [calmly sitting down and replacing the case on the table] How could he? There would be no clergyman to marry us. It would have to be quite morganatic.

THE INCA [returning.] Such an expression is out of place in the mouth of a princess aspiring to the highest destiny on earth. You have the morals of a dragoon. [She receives this with a shriek of laughter. He struggles with his sense of humor]. At the same time [he sits down] there is a certain coarse fun in the idea which compels me to smile [he turns up his moustache and smiles].

ERMYNTRUDE. When I marry the Inca's son, Captain, I shall make the Inca order you to cut off that moustache. It is too irresistible. Doesn't it fascinate everyone in Perusalem?

THE INCA [leaning forward to her energetically] By all the thunders of Thor, madam, it fascinates the whole world.

ERMYNTRUDE. What I like about you, Captain Duval, is your modesty.

THE INCA [straightening up suddenly] Woman: do not be a fool.

ERMYNTRUDE [indignant] Well!

THE INCA. You must look facts in the face. This moustache is an exact copy of the Inca's moustache. Well, does the world occupy itself with the Inca's moustache or does it not? Does it ever occupy itself with anything else? If that is the truth, does its recognition constitute the Inca a coxcomb? Other potentates have moustaches: even beards and moustaches. Does the world occupy itself with those beards and moustaches? Do the hawkers in the streets of every capital on the civilized globe sell ingenious cardboard representations of their faces on which, at the pulling of a simple string, the moustaches turn up and down, so [he makes his moustache turn up and down several times.] No! I say No. The Inca's moustache is so watched and studied that it has made his face the political barometer of the whole continent. When that moustache goes up, culture rises with it. Not what you call culture; but Kultur, a word so much more significant that I hardly understand it myself except when I am in specially good form. When it goes down, millions of men perish.

ERMYNTRUDE. You know, if I had a moustache like that, it would turn my head. I should go mad. Are you quite sure the Inca isn't mad?

THE INCA. How can he be mad, madam? What is sanity? The condition of the Inca's mind. What is madness? The condition of the people who disagree with the Inca.

ERMYNTRUDE. Then I am a lunatic because I don't like that ridiculous brooch.

THE INCA. No, madam: you are only an idiot.

ERMYNTRUDE. Thank you.

THE INCA. Mark you: it is not to be expected that you should see eye to eye with the Inca. That would be presumption. It is for you to accept without question or demur the assurance of your Inca that the brooch is a masterpiece.

ERMYNTRUDE. My Inca! Oh, come! I like that. He is not my Inca yet.

THE INCA. He is everybody's Inca, madam. His realm will yet extend to the confines of the habitable earth. It is his divine right; and let those who dispute it look to themselves. Properly speaking, all those who are now trying to shake his world predominance are not at war with him, but in rebellion against him.

ERMYNTRUDE. Well, he started it, you know.

THE INCA. Madam, be just. When the hunters surround the lion, the lion will spring. The Inca had kept the peace for years. Those who attacked him were steeped in blood, black blood, white blood, brown blood, yellow blood, blue blood. The Inca had never shed a drop.

ERMYNTRUDE. He had only talked.

THE INCA. Only talked! Only talked! What is more glorious than talk? Can anyone in the world talk like him? Madam: when he signed the declaration of war, he said to his foolish generals and admirals, 'Gentlemen: you will all be sorry for this/ And they are. They know now that they had better have relied on the sword of the spirit: in other words, on their Inca's talk, than on their murderous cannons. The world will one day do justice to the Inca as the man who kept the peace with nothing but his tongue and his moustache. While he talked: talked just as I am talking now to you, simply, quietly, sensibly, but GREATLY, there was peace; there was prosperity; Perusalem went from success^ to success. He has been silenced for a year by the roar of trinitrotoluene and the bluster of fools; and the world is in ruins. What a tragedy! [He is convulsed with grief].

ERMYNTRUDE. Captain Duval : I dont want to be unsympathetic; but suppose we get back to business.

THE INCA. Business! What business?

ERMYNTRUDE. Well, my business. You want me to marry one of the Inca's sons: I forget which.

THE INCA. As far as I can recollect the name, it is His Imperial Highness Prince Eitel William Frederick George Franz Josef Alexander Nicholas Victor Emmanuel Albert Theodore Wilson.

ERMYNTRUDE [interrupting] Oh, please, please, maynt I have one with a shorter name? What is he called at home?

THE INCA. He is usually called Sonny, madam. [With great charm of manner] But you will please understand that the Inca has no desire to pin you to any particular son. There is Chips and Spots and Lulu and Pongo and the Corsair and the Piffler and Jack Johnson the Second, all unmarried. At least not seriously married: nothing, in short, that cannot be arranged. They are ail at your service.

ERMYNTRUDE. Are they all as clever and charming as their father?

THE INCA [lifts his eyebrows pityingly; shrugs his shoulders; then, with indulgent paternal contempt] Excellent lads, madam. Very honest affectionate creatures. I have nothing against them. Pongo imitates farmyard sounds cock-crowing and that sort of thing extremely well. Lulu plays Strauss's Sinfonia Domestica on the mouth organ really screamingly. Chips keeps owls and rabbits. Spots motor bicycles. The Corsair commands canal barges and steers them himself. The Piffler writes plays, and paints most abominably. Jack Johnson trims ladies' hats, and boxes with professionals hired for that purpose. He is invariably victorious. Yes: they all have their different little talents. And also, of course, their family resemblances. For example, they all smoke; they all quarrel with one another; and they none of them appreciate their father, who, by the way, is no mean painter, though the Piffler pretends to ridicule his efforts.

ERMYNTRUDE. Quite a large choice, eh?

THE INCA. But very little to choose, believe me. I should not recommend Pongo, because he snores so frightfully that it has been necessary to build him a sound-proof bedroom: otherwise the royal family would get no sleep. But any of the others would suit equally well if you are really bent on marrying one

of them.

ERMYNTRUDE. If! What is this? I never wanted to marry one of them. I thought you wanted me to.

THE INCA. I did, madam; but [confidentially, flattering her] you are not quite the sort of person I expected you to be; and I doubt whether any of these young degenerates would make you happy. I trust I am not shewing any want of natural feeling when I say that from the point of view of a lively, accomplished, and beautiful woman [Ermyntrude bows] they might pall after a time. I suggest that you might prefer the Inca himself.

ERMYNTRUDE. Oh, Captain, how could a humble person like myself be of any interest to a prince who is surrounded with the ablest and most far-reaching intellects in the world?

THE INCA [explosively] What on earth are you talking about, madam? Can you name a single man in the entourage of the Inca who is not a born fool?

ERMYNTRUDE. Oh, how can you say that! There is Admiral von Cockpits

THE INCA [rising intolerantly and striding about the room] Von Cockpits! Madam: if Von Cockpits ever goes to heaven, before three weeks are over, the Angel Gabriel will be at war with the man in the moon.

ERMYNTRUDE. But General Von Schinkenbourg

THE INCA. Schinkenbourg! I grant you, Schinkenbourg has a genius for defending market gardens. Among market gardens he is invincible. But what is the good of that? The world does not consist of market gardens. Turn him loose in pasture and he is lost. The Inca has defeated all these generals again and again at manoeuvres; and yet he has to give place to them in the field because he would be blamed for every disaster accused of sacrificing the country to his vanity. Vanity! Why do they call him vain? Just because he is one of the few men who are not afraid to live. Why do they call themselves brave? Because they have not sense enough to be afraid to die. Within the last year the world has produced millions of heroes. Has it produced more than one Inca? [He resumes his seat].

ERMYNTRUDE. Fortunately not, Captain. I'd rather marry Chips.

THE INCA [making a wry face] Chips! Oh no: I wouldnt marry Chips.

ERMYNTRUDE. Why?

THE INCA [whispering the secret] Chips talks too much about himself.

ERMYNTRUDE. Well, what about Snooks?

THE INCA. Snooks? Who is he? Have I a son named Snooks? There are so many [wearily] so many that I often forget. [Casually] But I wouldnt marry him, anyhow, if I were you.

ERMYNTRUDE. But hasnt any of them inherited the family genius? Surely, if Providence has entrusted them with the care of Perusalem if they are all descended from Bedrock the Great

THE INCA [interrupting her impatiently] Madam: if you ask me, I consider Bedrock a grossly overrated monarch.

ERMYNTRUDE [shocked] Oh, Captain! Take care! Incadisparagement.

THE INCA. I repeat, grossly overrated. Strictly between ourselves, I do not believe all this about Providence entrusting the care of sixty million human beings to the abilities of Chips and the Piffler and Jack Johnson. I believe in individual genius. That is the Inca's secret. It must be. Why, hang it all, madam, if it were a mere family matter, the Inca's uncle would have been as great a man as the Inca. And well, everybody knows what the Inca's uncle was.

ERMYNTRUDE. My experience is that the relatives of men of genius are always the greatest duffers imaginable.

THE INCA. Precisely. That is what proves that the Inca is a man of genius. His relatives are duffers.

ERMYNTRUDE. But bless my soul, Captain, if all the Inca's generals are incapables, and all his relatives duffers, Perusalem will be beaten in the war; and then it will become a republic, like France after 1871, and the Inca will be sent to St Helena.

THE INCA [triumphantly] That is just what the Inca is playing for, madam. It is why he consented to the war.

ERMYNTRUDE. What!

THE INCA. Aha! The fools talk of crushing the Inca; but they little know their man. Tell me this. Why did St Helena extinguish Napoleon?

ERMYNTRUDE. I give it Up.

THE INCA. Because, madam, with certain rather remarkable qualities, which I should be the last to deny, Napoleon lacked versatility. After all, any fool can be a soldier: we know that only too well in Perusalem, where every fool is a soldier. But the Inca has a thousand other resources. He is an architect. Well, St Helena presents an unlimited field to the architect. He is a painter: need I remind you that St Helena is still without a National Gallery? He is a composer: Napoleon left no symphonies in St Helena. Send the Inca to St Helena, madam, and the world will crowd thither to see his works as they crowd now to Athens to see the Acropolis, to Madrid to see the pictures of Velasquez, to Bayreuth to see the music dramas of that egotistical old rebel Richard Wagner, who ought to have been shot before he was forty, as indeed he very nearly was. Take this from me: hereditary monarchs are played out: the age for men of genius has come: the career is open to the talents: before ten years have elapsed every civilized country from the Carpathians to the Rocky Mountains will be a Republic.

ERMYNTRUDE. Then goodbye to the Inca.

THE INCA. On the contrary, madam, the Inca will then have his first real chance. He will be unanimously invited by those Republics to return from his exile and act as Super-president of all the republics.

ERMYNTRUDE. But won't that be a come down for him? Think of it! after being Inca, to be a mere

President!

THE INCA. Well, why not! An Inca can do nothing. He is tied hand and foot. A constitutional monarch is openly called an india-rubber stamp. An emperor is a puppet. The Inca is not allowed to make a speech: he is compelled to take up a screed of flatulent twaddle written by some noodle of a minister and read it aloud. But look at the American President! He is the Allerhochst, if you like. No, madam, believe me, there is nothing like Democracy, American Democracy. Give the people voting papers: good long voting papers, American fashion; and while the people are reading the voting papers the Government does what it likes.

ERMYNTRUDE. What! You too worship before the statue of Liberty, like the Americans?

THE INCA. Not at all, madam. The Americans do not worship the statue of Liberty. They have erected it in the proper place for a statue of Liberty: on its tomb [he turns down his moustaches].

ERMYNTRUDE [laughing] Oh! Youd better not let them hear you say that. Captain.

THE INCA. Quite safe, madam: they would take it as a joke. [He rises]. And now, prepare yourself for a surprise. [She rises]. A shock. Brace yourself. Steel yourself. And do not be afraid.

ERMYNTRUDE. Whatever on earth can you be going to tell me, Captain?

THE INCA. Madam: I am no captain. I

ERMYNTRUDE. You are the Inca in disguise.

THE INCA. Good heavens! how do you know that? Who has betrayed me?

ERMYNTRUDE. How could I help divining it, Sir? Who is there in the world like you? Your magnetism

THE INCA. True: I had forgotten my magnetism. But you know now that beneath the trappings of Imperial Majesty there is a Man: simple, frank, modest, unaffected, colloquial: a sincere friend, a natural human being, a genial comrade, one eminently calculated to make a woman happy. You, on the other hand, are the most charming woman I have ever met. Your conversation is wonderful. I have sat here almost in silence, listening to your shrewd and penetrating account of my character, my motives, if I may say so, my talents. Never has such justice been done me: never have I experienced such perfect sympathy. Will you I hardly know how to put this will you be mine?

ERMYNTRUDE. Oh, Sir, you are married.

THE INCA. I am prepared to embrace the Mahometan faith, which allows a man four wives, if you will consent. It will please the Turks. But I had rather you did not mention it to the Inca-ess, if you dont mind.

ERMYNTRUDE. This is really charming of you. But the time has come for me to make a revelation. It is your Imperial Majesty's turn now to brace yourself. To steel yourself. I am not the princess. I am

THE INCA. The daughter of my old friend Archdeacon Daffodil Donkin, whose sermons are read to

me every evening after dinner. I never forget a face.

ERMYNTRUDE. You knew all along!

THE INCA [bitterly, throwing himself into his chair] And you supposed that I, who have been condemned to the society of princesses all my wretched life, believed for a moment that any princess that ever walked could have your intelligence!

ERMYNTRUDE. How clever of you, Sir! But you cannot afford to marry me.

THE INCA [springing up] Why not?

ERMYNTRUDE. You are too poor. You have to eat war bread. Kings nowadays belong to the poorer classes. The King of England does not even allow himself wine at dinner.

THE INCA [delighted\ Haw! Ha ha! Haw! haw! [he is convulsed with laughter, and finally has to relieve his feelings by waltzing half round the room].

ERMYNTRUDE. You may laugh, Sir; but I really could not live in that style. I am the widow of a millionaire, ruined by your little war.

THE INCA. A millionaire! What are millionaires now, with the world crumbling?

ERMYNTRUDE. Excuse me: mine was a hyphenated millionaire.

THE INCA. A highfalutin millionaire, you mean. [Chuckling] Haw! ha ha! really very nearly a pun, that. [He sits down in her chair].

ERMYNTRUDE [revolted, sinking into his chair] I think it quite the worst pun I ever heard.

THE INCA. The best puns have all been made years ago: nothing remained but to achieve the worst. However, madam [he rises majestically; and she is about to rise also]. No : I prefer a seated audience [she falls back into her seat at the imperious wave of his hand]. So [he clicks his heels]. Madam: I recognize my presumption in having sought the honor of your hand. As you say, I cannot afford it. Victorious as I am, I am hopelessly bankrupt; and the worst of it is, I am intelligent enough to know it. And I shall be beaten in consequence, because my most implacable enemy, though only a few months further away from bankruptcy than myself, has not a ray of intelligence, and will go on fighting until civilization is destroyed, unless I, out of sheer pity for the world, condescend to capitulate.

ERMYNTRUDE. The sooner the better, Sir. Many fine young men are dying while you wait. [Painfully.] Why? Why do they do it?

ERMYNTRUDE. Because you make them.

THE INCA. Stuff! How can I? I am only one man; and they are millions. Do you suppose they would really kill each other if they didnt want to, merely for the sake of my beautiful eyes? Do not be deceived by newspaper claptrap, madam. I was swept away by a passion not my own, which imposed itself on me. By myself I am nothing. I dare not walk down the principal street of my own capital in a coat two years old, though the sweeper of that street can wear one ten years old. You talk of death as an

unpopular thing. You are wrong: for years I gave them art, literature, science, prosperity, that they might live more abundantly; and they hated me, ridiculed me, caricatured me. Now that I give them death in its frightfullest forms, they are devoted to me. If you doubt me, ask those who for years have begged our taxpayers in vain for a few paltry thousands to spend on Life : on the bodies and minds of the nation's children, on the beauty and healthfulness of its cities, on the honor and comfort of its worn-outworkers. They refused; and because they refused, death is let loose on them. They grudged a few hundreds a year for their salvation: they now pay millions a day for their own destruction and damnation. And this they call my doing! Let them say it, if they dare, before the judgment seat at which they and I shall answer at last for what we have left undone no less than for what we have done. [Putting himself together suddenly] Madam: I have the honor to be your most obedient [he clicks his heels and bows].

ERMYNTRUDE, Sir! [she curtsies].

THE INCA [turning at the door] Oh, by the way, there is a princess, isnt there, somewhere on the premises?

ERMYNTRUDE. There is. Shall I fetch her?

THE INCA [dubious] Pretty awful, I suppose, eh?

ERMYNTRUDE. About the usual thing.

THE INCA [sighing] Ah well! What can one expect? I dont think I need trouble her personally. Will you explain to her about the boys?

ERMYNTRUDE. I am afraid the explanation will fall rather flat without your magnetism.

THE INCA [returning to her and speaking very humanly] You are making fun of me. Why does everybody make fun of me? Is it fair?

ERMYNTRUDE [seriously] Yes: it is fair. What other defence have we poor common people against your shining armor, your mailed fist, your pomp and parade, your terrible power over us? Are these things fair?

THE INCA. Ah, well, perhaps, perhaps. [He looks at his watch]. By the way, there is time for a drive round the town and a cup of tea at the Zoo. Quite a bearable band there: it does not play any patriotic airs. I am sorry you will not listen to any more permanent arrangement; but if you would care to come

ERMYNTRUDE [eagerly] Ratherrrrrr. I shall be delighted.

THE INCA [cautiously] In the strictest honor, you understand.

ERMYNTRUDE. Dont be afraid. I promise to refuse any incorrect proposals.

THE INCA [enchanted\ Oh! Charming woman: how well you understand men!

He offers her his arm: they go out together.

O'FLAHERTY V. C. A RECRUITING PAMPHLET

IT may surprise some people to learn that in 1915 this little play was a recruiting poster in disguise. The British officer seldom likes Irish soldiers; but he always tries to have a certain proportion of them in his battalion, because, partly from a want of common sense which leads them to value their lives less than Englishmen do (lives are really less worth living in a poor country), and partly because even the most cowardly Irishman feels obliged to outdo an Englishman in bravery if possible, and at least to set a perilous pace for him, Irish soldiers give impetus to those military operations which require for their spirited execution more devilment than prudence.

Unfortunately, Irish recruiting was badly bungled in 1915. The Irish were for the most part Roman Catholics and loyal Irishmen, which means that from the English point of view they were heretics and rebels. But they were willing enough to go soldiering on the side of France and see the world outside Ireland, which is a dull place to live in. It was quite easy to enlist them by approaching them from their own point of view. But the War Office insisted on approaching them from the point of view of Dublin Castle. They were discouraged and repulsed by refusals to give commissions to Roman Catholic officers, or to allow distinct Irish units to be formed. To attract them, the walls were covered with placards headed REMEMBER BELGIUM. The folly of asking an Irishman to remember anything when you want him to fight for England was apparent to everyone outside the Castle : FORGET AND FORGIVE would have been more to the point. Remembering Belgium and its broken treaty led Irishmen to remember Limerick and its broken treaty; and the recruiting ended in a rebellion, in suppressing which the British artillery quite unnecessarily reduced the centre of Dublin to ruins, and the British commanders killed their leading prisoners of war in cold blood morning after morning with an effect of long drawn out ferocity. Really it was only the usual childish petulance in which John Bull does things in a week that disgrace him for a century, though he soon recovers his good humor, and cannot understand why the survivors of his wrath do not feel as jolly with him as he does with them. On the smouldering ruins of Dublin the appeals to remember Louvain were presently supplemented by a fresh appeal. IRISHMEN: DO YOU WISH TO HAVE THE HORRORS OF WAR BROUGHT TO YOUR OWN HEARTHS AND HOMES? Dublin laughed sourly.

As for me, I addressed myself quite simply to the business of obtaining recruits. I knew by personal experience and observation what anyone might have inferred from the records of Irish emigration, that all an Irishman's hopes and ambitions turn on his opportunities of getting out of Ireland. Stimulate his loyalty, and he will stay in Ireland and die for her; for, incomprehensible as it seems to an Englishman, Irish patriotism does not take the form of devotion to England and England's king. Appeal to his discontent, his deadly boredom, his thwarted curiosity and desire for change and adventure, and, to escape from Ireland, he will go abroad to risk his life for France, for the Papal States, for secession in America, and even, if no better may be, for England. Knowing that the ignorance and insularity of the Irishman is a danger to himself and to his neighbours, I had no scruple in making that appeal when there was something for him to fight which the whole world had to fight unless it meant to come under the jack boot of the German version of Dublin Castle.

There was another consideration, unmentionable by the recruiting sergeants and war orators, which must nevertheless have helped them powerfully in procuring soldiers by voluntary enlistment. The happy home of the idealist may become common under millennial conditions. It is not common at present. No one will ever know how many men joined the army in 1914 and 1915 to escape from tyrants and taskmasters, termagants and shrews, none of whom are any the less irksome when they happen by ill-luck to be also our fathers, our mothers, our wives and our children. Even at their amiablest, a holiday from them may be a tempting change for all parties. That is why I did not endow

Flaherty, V.C. with an ideal Irish colleen for his sweetheart, and gave him for his mother a Volumnia of the potato patch rather than an affectionate parent from whom he could not so easily have torn himself away.

I need hardly say that a play thus carefully adapted to its purpose was voted utterly inadmissible; and in due course the British Government, frightened out of its wits for the moment by the rout of the Fifth Army, ordained Irish Conscription, and then did not dare to go through with it. I still think my own line was the more businesslike. But during the war everyone except the soldiers at the front imagined that nothing but an extreme assertion of our most passionate prejudices, without the smallest regard to their effect on others, could win the war. Finally the British blockade won the war; but the wonder is that the British blockhead did not lose it. I suppose the enemy was no wiser. War is not a sharpener of wits; and I am afraid I gave great offence by keeping my head in this matter of Irish recruiting. What can I do but apologize, and publish the play now that it can no longer do any good?

O'FLAHERTY V.C.

At the door of an Irish country house in a park. Fine summer weather: the summer of 1915. The porch is painted white, projects into the drive; but the door is at the side and the front has a window. The porch faces east; and the door is in the north side of it. On the south side is a tree in which a thrush is singing. Under the window is a garden seat with an iron chair at each end of it.

The last four bars of "God Save the King" are heard in the distance, followed by three cheers. Then the band strikes up "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" and recedes until it is out of hearing.

Private Flaherty V.C. comes wearily southward along the drive, and falls exhausted into the garden seat. The thrush utters a note of alarm and flies away. The tramp of a horse is heard.

A GENTLEMAN'S VOICE. Tim! Hi! Tim! [He is heard dismounting.

A LABORER'S VOICE. Yes, your honor.

THE GENTLEMAN'S VOICE. Take this horse to the stables, will you?

A LABORER'S VOICE. Right, your honor. Yup there. Gwan now. Gwan. [The horse is led away].

General Sir Pearce Madigan y an elderly baronet in khaki y beaming with enthusiasm, arrives. O'Flaherty rises and stands at attention.

SIR PEARCE. No, no, O'Flaherty : none of that now. You're off duty. Remember that though I am a general of forty years service, that little Cross of yours gives you a higher rank in the roll of glory than I can pretend to.

O'FLAHERTY [relaxing I'm thankful to you, Sir Pearce; but I wouldn't have anyone think that the baronet of my native place would let a common soldier like me sit down in his presence without leave.

SIR PEARCE. Well, you're not a common soldier, O'Flaherty: you're a very uncommon one; and I'm proud to have you for my guest here today.

O'FLAHERTY. Sure I know, sir. You have to put up with a lot from the like of me for the sake of the

recruiting. All the quality shakes hands with me and says they're proud to know me, just the way the king said when he pinned the Cross on me. And it's as true as I'm standing here, sir, the queen said to me "I hear you were born on the estate of General Madigan," she says; "and the General himself tells me you were always a fine young fellow." "Bedad, Mam!" I says to her, "if the General knew all the rabbits I snared on him, and all the salmon I snatched on him, and all the cows I milked on him, he'd think me the finest ornament for the county jail he ever sent there for poaching."

SIR PEARCE [laughing] You're welcome to them all, my lad. Come [he makes him sit down again on the garden seat] \ sit down and enjoy your holiday [he sits down on one of the iron chairs: the one at the doorless side of the porch].

O'FLAHERTY. Holiday, is it? I'd give five shillings to be back in the trenches for the sake of a little rest and quiet. I never knew what hard work was til I took to recruiting. What with the standing on my legs all day, and the shaking hands, and the making speeches, and what's worse the listening to them, and the calling for cheers for king and country, and the saluting the flag til I'm stiff with it, and the listening to them playing God Save the King and Tipperary, and the trying to make my eyes look moist like a man in a picture book, I'm that bet that I hardly get a wink of sleep. I give you my word, Sir Pearce, that I never heard the tune of Tipperary in my life til I came back from Flanders; and already it's drove me to that pitch of tiredness of it that when a poor little innocent slip of a boy in the street the other night drew himself up and saluted and began whistling it at me, I clouted his head for him, God forgive me.

SIR PEARCE [soothingly] Yes, yes: I know. / know. One does get fed up with it: I've been dog tired myself on parade many a time. But still, you know, there's a gratifying side to it, too. After all, he is our king; and it's our own country, isn't it?

O'FLAHERTY. Well, sir, to you that have an estate in it, it would feel like your country. But the devil a perch of it ever I owned. And as to the king, God help him, my mother would have taken the skin off my back if I'd ever let on to have any other king than Parnell.

SIR PEARCE. What are you dreaming about, O'Flaherty? A most loyal woman. Always most loyal. Whenever there is an illness in the Royal Family, she asks me every time we meet about the health of the patient as anxiously as if it were yourself, her only son.

O'FLAHERTY. Well, she's my mother; and I won't utter a word agan her. But I'm not saying a word of lie when I tell you that old woman is the biggest kanatt from here to the cross of Monasterboice. Sure she's the wildest Fenian and rebel, and always has been, that ever taught a poor innocent lad like myself to pray night and morning to St Patrick to clear the English out of Ireland the same as he cleared the snakes. You'll be surprised at my telling you that now, maybe, Sir Pearce?

SIR PEARCE [unable to keep still, walking away from O'Flaherty] Surprised! I'm more than surprised, O'Flaherty. I'm overwhelmed. [Turning and facing him] Are you are you joking?

O'FLAHERTY. If you'd been brought up by my mother, sir, you'd know better than to joke about her. What I'm telling you is the truth; and I wouldn't tell it to you if I could see my way to get out of the fix I'll be in when my mother comes here this day to see her boy in his glory, and she after thinking all the time it was against the English I was fighting.

SIR PEARCE. Do you mean to say you told her such a monstrous falsehood as that you were fighting

in the German army?

O'FLAHERTY. I never told her one word that wasnt the truth and nothing but the truth. I told her I was going to fight for the French and for the Russians; and sure who ever heard of the French or the Russians doing anything to the English but fighting them? That was how it was, sir. And sure the poor woman kissed me and went about the house, singing in her old cracky voice that the French was on the sea, and theyd be here without delay, and the Orange will decay, says the Shan Van Vocht.

SIR PEARCE [sitting down again, exhausted by his feelings] Well, I never could have believed this. Never. What do you suppose will happen when she finds out?

O'FLAHERTY. She mustnt find out. It's not that she'd half kill me, as big as I am and as brave as I am. It's that I'm fond of her, and cant bring myself to break the heart in her. You may think it queer that a man should be fond of his mother, sir, and she having bet him from the time he could feel to the time she was too slow to ketch him; but I'm fond of her; and I'm not ashamed of it. Besides, didnt she win the Cross forme?

SIR PEARCE. Your mother! How?

O'FLAHERTY. By bringing me up to be more afraid of running away than of fighting. I was timid by nature; and when the other boys hurted me, I'd want to run away and cry. But she whaled me for disgracing the blood of the O'Flahertys until I'd have fought the devil himself sooner than face her after finking a fight. That was how I got to know that fighting was easier than it looked, and that the others was as much afeard of me as I was of them, and that if I only held out long enough theyd lose heart and give up. That's the way I came to be so courageous. I tell you, Sir Pearce, if the German army had been brought up by my mother, the Kaiser would be dining in the banqueting hall at Buckingham Palace this day, and King George polishing his jack boots for him in the scullery.

SIR PEARCE. But I dont like this, O'Flaherty. You cant go on deceiving your mother, you know. It's not right.

O'FLAHERTY. Cant go on deceiving her, cant I? It's little you know what a son's love can do, sir. Did you ever notice what a ready liar I am?

SIR PEARCE. Well, in recruiting a man gets carried away. I stretch it a bit occasionally myself. After all, it's for king and country. But if you wont mind my saying it, O'Flaherty, I think that story about your fighting the Kaiser and the twelve giants of the Prussian guard singlehanded would be the better for a little toning down. I dont ask you to drop it, you know; for it's popular, undoubtedly; but still, the truth is the truth. Dont you think it would fetch in almost as many recruits if you reduced the number of guardsmen to six?

O'FLAHERTY. Youre not used to telling lies like I am, sir. I got great practice at home with my mother. What with saving my skin when I was young and thoughtless, and sparing her feelings when I was old enough to understand them, Ive hardly told my mother the truth twice a year since I was born; and would you have me turn round on her and tell it now, when she's looking to have some peace and quiet in her old age?

SIR PEARCE [troubled in his conscience] Well, it's not my affair, of course, O'Flaherty. But hadnt you better talk to Father Quinlan about it?

O'FLAHERTY. Talk to Father Quinlan, is it! Do you know what Father Quinlan says to me this very morning?

SIR PEARCE. Oh, youve seen him already, have you? What did he say?

O'FLAHERTY. He says "You know, dont you" he says "that it's your duty, as a Christian and a good son of the Holy Church, to love your enemies?" he says. "I know it's my juty as a soldier to kill them" I says. "Thats right, Dinny," he says: "quite right. But" says he "you can kill them and do them a good turn afterwards to shew your love for them" he says; "and it's your duty to have a mass said for the souls of the hundreds of Germans you say you killed," says he; "for many and many of them were Bavarians and good Catholics" he says. "Is it me that must pay for masses for the souls of the Boshes?" I says. "Let the King of England pay for them" I says; "for it was his quarrel and not mine."

SIR PEARCE [warmly] It is the quarrel of every honest man and true patriot, O'Flaherty. Your mother must see that as clearly as I do. After all, she is a reasonable, well disposed woman, quite capable of understanding the right and the wrong of the war. Why cant you explain to her what the war is about?

O'FLAHERTY. Arra, sir, how the divil do I know what the war is about?

SIR PEARCE [rising again and standing over him] What! O'Flaherty : do you know what you are saying? You sit there wearing the Victoria Cross for having killed God knows how many Germans; and you tell me you dont know why you did it!

O'FLAHERTY. Asking your pardon, Sir Pearce. I tell you no such thing. I know quite well why I kilt them. I kilt them because I was afeard that, if I didnt, theyd kill me.

SIR PEARCE [giving if up and sitting down again] Yes, yes, of course; but have you no knowledge of the causes of the war? of the interests at stake? of the importance I may almost say in fact I will say the sacred rights for which we are fighting? Dont you read the papers?

O'FLAHERTY. I do when I can get them. Theres not many newsboys crying the evening paper in the trenches. They do say, Sir Pearce, that we shall never beat the Boshes until we make Horatio Bottomley Lord Leftnant of England. Do you think thats true, sir?

SIR PEARCE. Rubbish, man! theres no Lord Lieutenant in England: the king is Lord Lieutenant. It's a simple question of patriotism. Does patriotism mean nothing to you?

O'FLAHERTY. It means different to me than what it would to you, sir. It means England and England's king to you. To me and the like of me, it means talking about the English just the way the English papers talk about the Boshes. And what good has it ever done here in Ireland? It's kept me ignorant^ because it filled up my mother's mind, and she thought it ought to fill up mine too. It's kept Ireland poor, because instead of trying to better ourselves we thought we was the fine fellows of patriots when we were speaking evil of Englishmen that was as poor as ourselves and maybe as good as ourselves. The Boshes I kilt was more knowledgable men than me: and what better am I now that Ive kilt them? What better is anybody?

SIR PEARCE [huffed, turning a cold shoulder to him] I am sorry the terrible experience of this war the greatest war ever fought has taught you no better, O 'Flaherty.

O'FLAHERTY [preserving his dignity] I dont know about it's being a great war, sir. It's a big war; but thats not the same thing. Father Quinlan's new church is a big church: you might take the little old chapel out of the middle of it and not miss it. But my mother says there was more true religion in the old chapel. And the war has taught me that may be she was right.

SIR PEARCE [grunts sulkily]

O'FLAHERTY [respectfully but doggedly] And theres another thing it's taught me too, sir, that concerns you and me, if I may make bold to tell it to you.

SIR PEARCE [still sulkily] I hope it's nothing you oughtnt to say to me, O'Flaherty.

O'FLAHERTY. It's this, sir: that I'm able to sit here now and talk to you without humbugging you; and thats what not one of your tenants or your tenants' childer ever did to you before in all your long life. It's a true respect Fm shewing you at last, sir. Maybe youd rather have me humbug you and tell you lies as I used, just as the boys here, God help them, would rather have me tell them how I fought the Kaiser, that all the world knows I never saw in my life, than tell them the truth. But I cant take advantage of you the way I used, not even if I seem to be wanting in respect to you and cocked up by winning the Cross.

SIR PEARCE [touched] Not at all, O'Flaherty. Not at all.

O'FLAHERTY. Sure whats the Cross to me, barring the little pension it carries? Do you think I dont know that theres hundreds of men as brave as me that never had the luck to get anything for their bravery but a curse from the sergeant, and the blame for the faults of them that ought to have been their betters? Ive learnt more than youd think, sir; for how would a gentleman like you know what a poor ignorant conceited creature I was when I went from here into the wide world as a soldier? What use is all the lying, and pretending, and humbugging, and letting on, when the day comes to you that your comrade is killed in the trench beside you, and you dont as much as look round at him until you trip over his poor body, and then all you say is to ask why the hell the stretcher-bearers dont take it out of the way. Why should I read the papers to be humbugged and lied to by them that had the cunning to stay at home and send me to fight for them? Dont talk to me or to any soldier of the war being right. No war is right; and all the holy water that Father Quinlan ever blessed couldnt make one right. There, sir! Now you know what O'Flaherty V.C. thinks; and youre wiser so than the others that only knows what he done.

SIR PEARCE [making the best of it, and turning good-humoredly to him again] Well, what you did was brave and manly, anyhow.

O'FLAHERTY. God knows whether it was or not, better than you nor me, General. I hope He wont be too hard on me for it, anyhow.

SIR PEARCE [sympathetically] Oh yes: we all have to think seriously sometimes, especially when we're a little run down. I'm afraid weve been overworking you a bit over these recruiting meetings. However, we can knock off for the rest of the day; and tomorrow's Sunday. Ive had about as much as I can stand myself. [He looks at his watch]. It's tea time. I wonder whats keeping your mother.

O'FLAHERTY. It's nicely cocked up the old woman will be having tea at the same table as you, sir,

instead of in the kitchen. She'll be after dressing in the height of grandeur; and stop she will at every house on the way to shew herself off and tell them where she's going, and fill the whole parish with spite and envy. But sure, she shouldnt keep you waiting, sir.

SIR PEARCE. Oh, thats all right: she must be indulged on an occasion like this. I'm sorry my wife is in London: she'd have been glad to welcome your mother.

O'FLAHERTY. Sure, I know she would, sir. She was always a kind friend to the poor. Little her ladyship knew, God help her, the depth of divilment that was in us: we were like a play to her. You see, sir, she was English: that was how it was. We was to her what the Pathans and Senegalese was to me when I first seen them: I couldnt think, somehow, that they were liars, and thieves, and backbiters, and drunkards, just like ourselves or any other Christians. Oh, her ladyship never knew all that was going on behind her back: how would she? When I was a wee shy child, she gave me the first penny I ever had in my hand; and I wanted to pray for her conversion that night the same as my mother made me pray for yours; and

SIR PEARCE [scandalized] Do you mean to say that your mother made you pray for my conversion?

O'FLAHERTY. Sure and she wouldnt want to see a gentleman like you going to hell after she nursing your own son and bringing up my sister Annie on the bottle. That was how it was, sir. She'd rob you; and she'd lie to you; and she'd call down all the blessings of God on your head when she was selling you your own three geese that you thought had been ate by the fox the day after youd finished fattening them, sir; and all the time you were like a bit of her own flesh and blood to her. Often has she said she'd live to see you a good Catholic yet, leading victorious armies against the English and wearing the collar of gold that Malachi won from the proud invader. Oh, she's the romantic woman is my mother, and no mistake.

SIR PEARCE [in great perturbation] I really cant believe this, O'Flaherty. I could have sworn your mother was as honest a woman as ever breathed.

O'FLAHERTY. And so she is, sir. She's as honest as the day.

SIR PEARCE. Do you call it honest to steal my geese?

O'FLAHERTY. She didnt steal them, sir. It was me that stole them.

SIR PEARCE. Oh! And why the devil did you steal them?

O'FLAHERTY. Sure we needed them, sir. Often and often we had to sell our own geese to pay you the rent to satisfy your needs; and why shouldnt we sell your geese to satisfy ours?

SIR PEARCE. Well, damn me!

O'FLAHERTY [sweetly] Sure you had to get what you could out of us; and we had to get what we could out of you. God forgive us both!

SIR PEARCE. Really, O'Flaherty, the war seems to have upset you a little.

O'FLAHERTY. It's set me thinking, sir; and I'm not used to it. It's like the patriotism of the English.

They never thought of being patriotic until the war broke out; and now the patriotism has took them so sudden and come so strange to them that they run about like frightened chickens, uttering all manner of nonsense. But please God they'll forget all about it when the war's over. They're getting tired of it already.

SIR PEARCE. No, no: it has uplifted us all in a wonderful way. The world will never be the same again, O'Flaherty. Not after a war like this.

O'FLAHERTY. So they all say, sir. I see no great differ myself. It's all the fright and the excitement; and when that quiets down they'll go back to their natural divilment and be the same as ever. It's like the vermin: it'll wash off after a while.

SIR PEARCE [rising and planting himself firmly behind the garden seat] Well, the long and the short of it is, O'Flaherty, I must decline to be a party to any attempt to deceive your mother. I thoroughly disapprove of this feeling against the English, especially at a moment like the present. Even if your mother's political sympathies are really what you represent them to be, I should think that her gratitude to Gladstone ought to cure her of such disloyal prejudices.

O'FLAHERTY (over his shoulder) She says Gladstone was an Irishman, sir. What call would he have to meddle with Ireland as he did if he wasn't?

SIR PEARCE. What nonsense! Does she suppose Mr Asquith is an Irishman?

O'FLAHERTY. She won't give him any credit for Home Rule, sir. She says Redmond made him do it. She says you told her so.

SIR PEARCE [convicted out of his own mouth] Well, I never meant her to take it up in that ridiculous way. [He moves to the end of the garden seat on 'Flaherty's left] I'll give her a good talking to when she comes. I'm not going to stand any of her nonsense.

O'FLAHERTY. It's not a bit of use, sir. She says all the English generals is Irish. She says all the English poets and great men was Irish. She says the English never knew how to read their own books until we taught them. She says we're the lost tribes of the house of Israel and the chosen people of God. She says that the goddess Venus, that was born out of the foam of the sea, came up out of the water in Killiney Bay off Bray Head. She says that Moses built the seven churches, and that Lazarus was buried in Glasnevin.

SIR PEARCE. Bosh! How does she know he was? Did you ever ask her?

O'FLAHERTY. I did, sir, often.

SIR PEARCE. And what did she say?

O'FLAHERTY. She asked me how did I know he wasn't, and fetched me a clout on the side of my head.

SIR PEARCE. But have you never mentioned any famous Englishman to her, and asked her what she had to say about him?

O'FLAHERTY. The only one I could think of was Shakespear, sir; and she says he was born in Cork.

SIR PEARCE [exhausted] Well, I give it up [he throws himself into the nearest chair] The woman is Oh, well! No matter.

O'FLAHERTY [sympathetically] Yes, sir: she's pigheaded and obstinate: theres no doubt about it. She's like the English: they think theres no one like themselves. It's the same with the Germans, though theyre educated and ought to know better. Youll never have a quiet world til you knock the patriotism out of the human race.

SIR PEARCE. Still, we

O'FLAHERTY. Whisht, sir, for God's sake: here she is.

The General jumps up. Mrs O' Flaherty arrives, and comes between the two men. She is very clean, and carefully dressed in the old fashioned peasant costume: black silk sunbonnet with a tiara of trimmings, and black cloak.

O'FLAHERTY [rising shyly] Good evening, mother.

MRS O'FLAHERTY [severely] You hold your whisht, and learn behavior while I pay my juty to his honor. [To Sir Pearce, heartily] And how is your honor's good self? And how is her ladyship and all the young ladies? Oh, it's right glad we are to see your honor back again and looking the picture of health.

SIR PEARCE [forcing a note of extreme geniality] Thank you, Mrs O'Flaherty. Well, you see weve brought you back your son safe and sound. I hope youre proud of him.

MRS O'FLAHERTY. And indeed and I am, your honor. It's the brave boy he is; and why wouldnt he be, brought up on your honor's estate and with you before his eyes for a pattern of the finest soldier in Ireland. Come and kiss your old mother, Dinny darlin'. [Flaherty does so sheepishly]. Thats my own darlint boy. And look at your fine new uniform stained already with the eggs youve been eating and the porter youve been drinking. [She fakes out her handkerchief; spits on it; and scrubs his lapel with it]. Oh, it's the untidy slovenly one you always were. There! It wont be seen on the khaki: it's not like the old red coat that would shew up everything that dribbled down on it. [To Sir Pearce] And they tell me down at the lodge that her ladyship is staying in London, and that Miss Agnes is to be married to a fine young nobleman. Oh, it's your honor that is the lucky and happy father! It will be bad news for many of the young gentlemen of the quality round here, sir. Theres lots thought she was going to marry young Master Lawless

SIR PEARCE. What! that that that bosthoon!

MRS O'FLAHERTY [hilariously] Let your honor alone for finding the right word! A big bosthoon he is indeed, your honor. Oh, to think of the times and times I have said that Miss Agnes would be my lady as her mother was before her! Didnt I, Dinny?

SIR PEARCE. And now, Mrs O'Flaherty, I daresay you have a great deal to say to Dennis that doesnt concern me. I'll just go in and order tea.

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Oh, why would your honor disturb yourself? Sure I can take the boy into the

yard.

SIR PEARCE. Not at all. It wont disturb me in the least. And he's too big a boy to be taken into the yard now. He has made a front seat for himself. Eh? [He goes into the house].

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Sure he has that, your honor. God bless your honor! [The General being now out of hearing, she turns threateningly to her son with one of those sudden Irish changes of manner which amaze and scandalize less flexible nations, and exclaims] And what do you mean, you lying young scald, by telling me you were going to fight agen the English? Did you take me for a fool that couldnt find out, and the papers all full of you shaking hands with the English king at Buckingham Palace?

O'FLAHERTY. I didnt shake hands with him: he shook hands with me. Could I turn on the man in his own house, before his own wife, with his money in my pocket and in yours, and throw his civility back in his face?

MRS O'FLAHERTY. You would take the hand of a tyrant red with the blood of Ireland

O'FLAHERTY. Arra hold your nonsense, mother: he's not half the tyrant you are, God help him. His hand was cleaner than mine that had the blood of his own relations on it, may be.

MRS O'FLAHERTY [threateningly] Is that a way to speak to your mother, you young spalpeen?

O'FLAHERTY [stoutly] It is so, if you wont talk sense to me. It's a nice thing for a poor boy to be made much of by kings and queens, and shook hands with by the heighth of his country's nobility in the capital cities of the world, and then to come home and be scolded and insulted by his own mother. I'll fight for who I like; and I'll shake hands with what kings I like; and if your own son is not good enough for you, you can go and look for another. Do you mind me now?

MRS O'FLAHERTY. And was it the Belgians learned you such brazen impudence?

O'FLAHERTY. The Belgians is good men; and the French ought to be more civil to them, let alone their being half murdered by the Boshes. '

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Good men is it. Good men! to come over here when they were wounded because it was a Catholic country, and then to go to the Protestant Church because it didnt cost them anything, and some of them to never go near a church at all. Thats what you call good men!

O'FLAHERTY. Oh, youre the mighty fine politician, arnt you? Much you know about Belgians or foreign parts or the world youre living in, God help you!

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Why wouldnt I know better than you? Amment I your mother?

O'FLAHERTY. And if you are itself, how can you know what you never seen as well as me that was dug into the continent of Europe for six months, and was buried in the earth of it three times with the shells bursting on the top of me? I tell you I know what I'm about. I have my own reasons for taking part in this great conflict. I'd be ashamed to stay at home and not fight when everybody else is fighting.

MRS O'FLAHERTY. If you wanted to fight, why couldnt you fight in the German army?

O'FLAHERTY. Because they only get a penny a day.

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Well, and if they do itself, isnt there the French army?

O'FLAHERTY. They only get a hapenny a day.

MRS O'FLAHERTY [much dashed] Oh murder! They must be a mean lot, Dinny.

O'FLAHERTY [sarcastic] Maybe youd have me join the Turkish army, and worship the heathen Mahomet that put a corn in his ear and pretended it was a message from the heavens when the pigeon come to pick it out and eat it. I went where I could get the biggest allowance for you; and little thanks I get for it!

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Allowance, is it! Do you know what the thieving blackguards did on me? They came to me and they says, "Was your son a big eater?" they says. "Oh, he was that" says I: "ten shillings a week wouldnt keep him/" Sure I thought the more I said the more theyd give me. "Then," says they, "thats ten shillings a week off your allowance" they says, "because you save that by the king feeding him." "Indeed!" says I: "I suppose if I'd six sons, youd stop three pound a week from me, and make out that I ought to pay you money instead of you paying me." "Theres a fallacy in your argument" they says.

O'FLAHERTY. A what?

MRS O'FLAHERTY. A fallacy: thats the word he said. I says to him, "It's a Pharisee I'm thinking you mean, sir; but you can keep your dirty money that your king grudges a poor old widow; and please God the English will be bet yet for the deadly sin of oppressing the poor"; and with that I shut the door in his face.

O'FLAHERTY [furious] Do you tell me they knocked ten shillings off you for my keep?

MRS O'FLAHERTY [soothing him] No, darlint: they only knocked off half a crown. I put up with it because Ive got the old age pension; and they know very well I'm only sixty-two ; so Ive the better of them by half a crown a week anyhow.

O'FLAHERTY. It's a queer way of doing business. If theyd tell you straight out what they was going to give you, you wouldnt mind; but if there was twenty ways of telling the truth and only one way of telling a lie, the Government would find it out. It's in the nature of governments to tell lies.

Teresa Driscoll, a parlor maid, comes from the house.

TERESA. Youre to come up to the drawing room to have your tea, Mrs O'Flaherty.

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Mind you have a sup of good black tea for me in the kitchen afterwards, acushla. That washy drawing room tea will give me the wind if I leave it on my stomach. [She goes into the house, leaving the two young people alone together].

O'FLAHERTY. Is that yourself, Tessie? And how are you

TERESA. Nicely, thank you. And hows yourself?

O'FLAHERTY. Finely, thank God. [He produces a gold chain]. Look what Ive brought you, Tessie.

TERESA [shrinking Sure I dont like to touch it, Denn. Did you take it off a dead man?

O'FLAHERTY. No: I took it off a live one; and thankful he was to me to be alive and kept a prisoner in ease and comfort, and me left fighting in peril of my life.

TERESA [taking it] Do you think it's real gold, Denny?

O'FLAHERTY. It's real German gold, anyhow.

TERESA. But German silver isnt real, Denny.

O'FLAHERTY [his face darkening] Well, it's the best the Bosh could do for me, anyhow.

TERESA. Do you think I might take it to the jeweler next market day and ask him?

O'FLAHERTY [sulkily] You may take it to the devil if you like.

TERESA. You neednt lose your temper about it. I only thought I'd like to know. The nice fool I'd look if I went about shewing off a chain that turned out to be only brass!

O'FLAHERTY. I think you might say Thank you.

TERESA. Do you? I think you might have said something more to me than "Is that yourself?" You couldnt say less to the postman.

O'FLAHERTY [his brow clearing] Oh, is that whats the matter? Here! come and take the taste of the brass out of me mouth. [He seizes her and kisses her].

Teresa, without losing her Irish dignity, takes the kiss as appreciatively as a connoisseur might take a glass of wine and sits down with him on the garden seat.

TERESA [as he squeezes her waist] Thank God the priest cant see us here!

O'FLAHERTY. It's little they care for priests in France, alanna.

TERESA. And what had the queen on her, Denny, when she spoke to you in the palace?

O'FLAHERTY. She had a bonnet on without any strings to it. And she had a plakeen of embroidery down her bosom. And she had her waist where it used to be, and not where the other ladies had it. And she had little brooches in her ears, though she hadnt half the jewelry of Mrs Sullivan that keeps the popshop in Drumpogue. And she dresses her hair down over her forehead, in a fringe like. And she has an Irish look about her eyebrows. And she didnt know what to say to me, poor woman! and I didnt know what to say to her, God help me!

TERESA. Youll have a pension now with the Cross, wont you, Denny?

O'FLAHERTY. Sixpence three farthings a day.

TERESA. That isnt much.

O'FLAHERTY. I take out the rest in glory.

TERESA. And if youre wounded, youll have a wound pension, wont you?

O'FLAHERTY. I will, please God.

TERESA. Youre going out again, arnt you, Denny?

O'FLAHERTY. I cant help myself. I'd be shot for a deserter if I didnt go; and may be I'll be shot by the Boshes if I do go; so between the two of them I'm nicely fixed up.

MRS O'FLAHERTY [calling from within the house] Tessie! Tessie, darlint!

TERESA [disengaging herself from his arm and rising] I'm wanted for the tea table. Youll have a pension anyhow, Denny, wont you, whether youre wounded or not?

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Come, child, come.

TERESA [impatiently] Oh, sure I'm coming. [She tries to smile at Denny, not very convincingly, and hurries into the house].

O'FLAHERTY [alone] And if I do get a pension itself, the divil a penny of it youll ever have the spending of.

MRS O'FLAHERTY [as she comes from the porch] Oh, it's a shame for you to keep the girl from her ju ties, Dinny. You might get her into trouble.

O'FLAHERTY. Much I care whether she gets into trouble or not! I pity the man that gets her into trouble. He'll get himself into worse.

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Whats that you tell me? Have you been falling out with her, and she a girl with a fortune of ten pounds?

O'FLAHERTY. Let her keep her fortune. I wouldnt touch her with the tongs if she had thousands and millions.

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Oh fie for shame, Dinny! why would you say the like of that of a decent honest girl, and one of the Driscolls too?

O'FLAHERTY. Why wouldnt I say it? She's thinking of nothing but to get me out there again to be wounded so that she may spend my pension, bad scan to her!

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Why, whats come over you, child, at all at all?

O'FLAHERTY. Knowledge and wisdom has come over me with pain and fear and trouble. Ive been

made a fool of and imposed upon all my life. I thought that covetous shrew in there was a walking angel; and now if ever I marry at all I'll marry a Frenchwoman.

MRS O'FLAHERTY [fiercely] You'll not, so; and don't you dare repeat such a thing to me.

O'FLAHERTY. Won't I, faith! I've been as good as married to a couple of them already.

MRS O'FLAHERTY. The Lord be praised, what wickedness have you been up to, you young blackguard?

O'FLAHERTY. One of them Frenchwomen would cook you a meal twice in the day and all days and every day that Sir Pearce himself might go begging through Ireland for, and never see the like of. I'll have a French wife, I tell you; and when I settle down to be a farmer I'll have a French farm, with a field as big as the continent of Europe that ten of your dirty little fields here wouldn't so much as fill the ditch of.

MRS O'FLAHERTY [furious] Then it's a French mother you may go look for; for I'm done with you.

O'FLAHERTY. And it's no great loss you'd be if it wasn't for my natural feelings for you; for it's only a silly ignorant old countrywoman you are with all your fine talk about Ireland: you that never stepped beyond the few acres of it you were born on!

MRS O'FLAHERTY [tottering to the garden seat and shewing signs of breaking down] Dinny darlint, why are you like this to me? What's happened to you?

O'FLAHERTY [gloomily] What's happened to everybody? that's what I want to know. What's happened to you that I thought all the world of and was afraid of? What's happened to Sir Pearce, that I thought was a great general, and that I now see to be no more fit to command an army than an old hen? What's happened to Tessie, that I was mad to marry a year ago, and that I wouldn't take now with all Ireland for her fortune? I tell you the world's creation is crumbling in ruins about me; and then you come and ask what's happened to me?

MRS O'FLAHERTY [giving way to wild grief] Ochone! ochone! my son's turned agen me. Oh, what do I do at all at all? Oh! oh! oh! oh!

SIR PEARCE [running out of the house] What's this infernal noise? What on earth is the matter?

O'FLAHERTY. Arra hold your whisht, mother. Don't you see his honor?

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Oh, sir, I'm ruined and destroyed. Oh, won't you speak to Dinny, sir: I'm heart scalded with him. He wants to marry a Frenchwoman on me, and to go away and be a foreigner and desert his mother and betray his country. It's mad he is with the roaring of the cannons and he killing the Germans and the Germans killing him, bad cess to them! My boy is taken from me and turned agen me; and who is to take care of me in my old age after all I've done for him, ochone! ochone!

O'FLAHERTY. Hold your noise, I tell you. Who's going to leave you? I'm going to take you with me. There now: does that satisfy you?

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Is it take me into a strange land among heathens and pagans and savages, and me

not knowing a word of their language nor them of mine?

O'FLAHERTY. A good job they dont: may be theyll think youre talking sense.

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Ask me to die out of Ireland, is it? and the angels not to find me when they come for me!

O'FLAHERTY. And would you ask me to live in Ireland where Ive been imposed on and kept in ignorance, and to die where the devil himself wouldnt take me as a gift, let alone the blessed angels? You can come or stay. You can take your old way or take my young way. But stick in this place I will not among a lot of good-for-nothing divils thatll not do a hand's turn but watch the grass growing and build up the stone wall where the cow walked through it. And Sir Horace Plunkett breaking his heart all the time telling them how they might put the land into decent tillage like the French and Belgians.

SIR PEARCE. Yes: he's quite right, you know, Mrs O'Flaherty : quite right there.

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Well, sir, please God the war will last a long time yet; and may be I'll die before it's over and the separation allowance stops.

O'FLAHERTY. Thats all you care about. It's nothing but milch cows we men are for the women, with their separation allowances, ever since the war began, bad luck to them that made it!

TERESA [coming from the porch between the General and Mrs O'Flaherty] Hannah sent me out for to tell you, sir, that the tea will be black and the cake not fit to eat with the cold if yous all dont come at wanst.

MRS O'FLAHERTY [breaking out again] Oh, Tessie darlint, what have you been saying to Dinny at all at all? Oh! oh

SIR PEARCE [out of patience] You cant discuss that here. We shall have Tessie beginning now.

O'FLAHERTY. Thats right, sir: drive them in.

TERESA. I havnt said a word to him. He

SIR PEARCE. Hold your tongue; and go in and attend to your business at the tea table.

TERESA. But amment I telling your honor that I never said a word to him? He gave me a beautiful gold chain. Here it is to shew your honour thats it's no lie I'm telling you.

SIR PEARCE. Whats this, O'Flaherty? Youve been looting some unfortunate officer.

O'FLAHERTY. No sir: I stole it from him of his own accord.

MRS O'FLAHERTY. Wouldnt your honor tell him that his mother has the first call on it? What would a slip of a girl like that be doing with a gold chain round her neck?

TERESA [venomously] Anyhow, I have a neck to put it round and not a hank of wrinkles.

At this unfortunate remark, Mrs O'Flaherty bounds from her seat; and an appalling tempest of wordy wrath breaks out. The remonstrances and commands of the General, and the protests and menaces of O'Flaherty only increase the hubbub. They are soon all speaking at once at the top of their voices.

MRS O'FLAHERTY [solo] You impudent young heifer, how dar you say such a thing to me? [Teresa retorts furiously; the men interfere; and the solo becomes a quartet^fortissimd\]. Ive a good mind to clout your ears for you to teach you manners. Be ashamed of yourself, do; and learn to know who youre speaking to. That I maynt sin! but I dont know what the good God was thinking about when he made the like of you. Let me not see you casting sheep's eyes at my son again. There never was an O'Flaherty yet that would demean himself by keeping company with a dirty Driscoll; and if I see you next or nigh my house I'll put you in the ditch with a flea in your ear: mind that now.

THERESA. Is it me you offer such a name to, you foulmouthed, dirty minded, lying, sloothering old sow, you? I wouldnt soil my tongue by calling you in your right name and telling Sir Pearce whats the common talk of the town about you. You and your O'Flahertys! setting yourself up agen the Driscolls that would never lower themselves to be seen in conversation with you at the fair. You can keep your ugly stingy lump of a son; for what he is but a common soldier? and God help the girl that gets him, say I! So the back of my hand to you, Mrs O'Flaherty; and that the cat may tear your ugly old face!

SIR PEARCE. Silence. Tessie: did you here me ordering you to go into the house? Mrs O'Flaherty! [Louder] Mrs O'Flaherty!! Will you just listen to me one moment? Please. [Furiously] Do you hear me speaking to you, woman? Are you human beings or are you wild beasts? Stop that noise immediately: do you hear? [Yelling] Are you going to do what I order you, or are you not? Scandalous! Disgraceful! This comes of being too familiar with you. O'Flaherty: shove them into the house. Out with the whole damned pack of you.

O'FLAHERTY [to the women] Here now: none of that, none of that. Go easy, I tell you. Hold your whisht, mother, will you, or youll be sorry for it after. [To Teresa] Is that the way for a decent young girl to speak? [Despairingly] Oh, for the Lord's sake, shut up, will yous? Have yous no respect for yourselves or your betters? [Peremptorily] Let me have no more of it, I tell you. Och! the devil's in the whole crew of you. In with you into the house this very minute and tear one another's eyes out in the kitchen if you like. In with you.

The two men seize the two women, and push them, still violently abusing one another, into the house. Sir Pearce slams the door upon them savagely. Immediately a heavenly silence falls on the summer afternoon. The two sit down out of breath; and for a long time nothing is said. Sir Pearce sits on an iron chair. O'Flaherty sits on the garden seat. The thrush begins to sing melodiously. O'Flaherty cocks his ears, and looks up at it. A smile spreads over his troubled features. Sir Pearce, with a long sigh, takes out his pipe, and begins to fill it.

O'FLAHERTY [idyllically] What a discontented sort of an animal a man is, sir! Only a month ago, I was in the quiet of the country out at the front, with not a sound except the birds and the bellow of a cow in the distance as it might be, and the shrapnel making little clouds in the heavens, and the shells whistling, and may be a yell or two when one of us was hit; and would you believe it, sir, I complained of the noise and wanted to have a peaceful hour at home. Well: them two has taught me a lesson. This morning, sir, when I was telling the boys here how I was longing to be back taking my part for king and country with the others, I was lying, as you well knew, sir. Now I can go and say it with a clear conscience. Some likes war's alarums; and some likes home life. Ive tried both, sir; and Fm all for war's alarums now. I always was a quiet lad by natural disposition.

SIR PEARCE. Strictly between ourselves, O'Flaherty, and as one soldier to another [O'Flaherty salutes]
But without stiffening do you think we should have got an army without conscription if domestic life
had been as happy as people say it is?

O'FLAHERTY. Well, between you and me and the wall, Sir Pearce, I think the less we say about that
until the war's over, the better.

He winks at the General. The General strikes a match. The thrush sings. A jay laughs. The conversation
drops.

THE MUSIC-CURE A PIECE OF UTTER NONSENSE

THIS is not a serious play; it is what is called a Variety Turn for two musicians. It is written for two pianists, but can be adapted to any instruments on which the performers happen to be proficient. At its first performance by Miss Madge McIntosh and Mr William Armstrong the difficulty arose that, though Mr Armstrong was an accomplished pianist, Miss McIntosh's virtuosity was confined to the English concertina. That did just as well.

As a last desperate resort a pianola behind the scenes can be employed; but the result will lack spontaneity.

There is, however, no pressing reason why the thing should be performed at all.

THE MUSIC-CURE

REGINALD FITZAMBEY, a fashionably dressed, rather pretty young man of 22, is prostrate on a sofa in a large hotel drawing room, crying convulsively. His doctor is trying to soothe him. The doctor is about a dozen years his senior; and his ways are the ways of a still youthful man who considers himself in smart society as well as professionally attendant on it.

The drawing room has tall central doors, at present locked. If anyone could enter under these circumstances, he would find on his left a grand piano with the keyboard end towards him, and a smaller door beyond the piano. On his right would be the window, and, further on, the sofa on which the unhappy youth is wallowing, with, close by it, the doctor's chair and a little table accommodating the doctor's hat, a plate, a medicine bottle, a half emptied glass, and a bell call.

THE DOCTOR. Come come! be a man. Now really this is silly. You mustnt give way like this. I tell you nothing's happened to you. Hang it all! it's not the end of the world if you did buy a few Shares.

REGINALD [interrupting him frantic ally] I never meant any harm in buying those shares. I am ready to give them up. Oh, I never meant any harm in buying those shares. I never meant any harm in buying those shares. [Clutching the doctor imploringly] Wont you believe me, Doctor? I never meant any harm in buying those shares. I never...

THE DOCTOR [extricating himself and replacing Reginald on the couch, not very gently] Of course you didnt. I know you didnt.

REGINALD. I never...

THE DOCTOR [desperate] Dont go on saying that over and over again or you will drive us all as distracted as you are yourself. This is nothing but nerves. Remember that youre in a hotel. Theyll put you out if you make a row.

REGINALD [tearfully] But you dont understand. Oh, why wont anybody understand? I never...

THE DOCTOR [shouting him down] You never meant any harm in buying those shares. This is the four hundredth time youve said it.

REGINALD [wildly] Then why do you keep asking me the same questions over and over again? It's not fair. I've told you I never meant any harm in...

THE DOCTOR. Yes, yes, yes: I know, I know. You think you made a fool of yourself before that committee. Well, you didn't. You stood up to it for six days with the coolness of an iceberg and the cheerfulness of an idiot. Every member of it had a go at you; and everyone of them, including some of the cleverest cross-examiners in London, fell back baffled before your fatuous self-satisfaction, your impenetrable inability to see any reason why you shouldn't have bought those shares.

REGINALD. But why shouldn't I have bought them? I made no secret of it. When the Prime Minister ragged me about it I offered to sell him the shares for what I gave for them.

THE DOCTOR. Yes, after they had fallen six points. But never mind that. The point for you is that you are an under-secretary in the War Office. You knew that the army was going to be put on vegetarian diet, and that the British Maccaroni Trust shares would go up with a rush when this became public. And what did you do?

REGINALD. I did what any fellow would have done. I bought all the shares I could afford.

THE DOCTOR. You bought a great many more than you could afford.

REGINALD. But why shouldn't I? Explain it to me. I'm anxious to learn. I meant no harm. I see no harm. Why am I to be badgered because the beastly Opposition papers and all the Opposition rotters on that committee try to make party capital out of it by saying that it was disgraceful? It wasn't disgraceful: it was simple common sense. I'm not a financier; but you can't persuade me that if you happen to know that certain shares are going to rise you shouldn't buy them. It would be flying in the face of Providence not to. And they wouldn't see that. They pretended not to see it. They worried me, and kept asking me the same thing over and over again, and wrote blackguardly articles about me

THE DOCTOR. And you got the better of them all because you couldn't see their point of view. But what beats me is why you broke down afterwards.

REGINALD. Everyone was against me. I thought the committee a pack of fools; and I as good as told them so. But everyone took their part. The governor said I had disgraced the family name. My brothers said I ought to resign from my clubs. My mother said that all her hopes of marrying me to a rich woman were shattered. And I'd done nothing: absolutely nothing to what other chaps are doing every day.

THE DOCTOR. Well, the long and short of it is that officials mustn't gamble.

REGINALD. But I wasn't gambling. I knew. It isn't gambling if you know that the shares will go up. It's a cert.

THE DOCTOR. Well, all I can tell you is that if you weren't a son of the Duke of Dunmow, you'd have to resign; and

REGINALD [breaking down] Oh, stop talking to me about it. Let me alone, I can't bear it. I never meant any harm in buying those shares. I never meant any harm

THE DOCTOR. Sh-sh-sh-sh-sh! There: I shouldnt have started the subject again. Take some of this valerian [he puts the glass to Reginald's lips]. Thats right. Now youre better.

REGINALD [exhausted but calm] Why does valerian soothe me when it excites cats? Theres a question to reflect on! You know, they ought to have made me a philosopher.

THE DOCTOR. Philosophers are born, not made.

REGINALD. Fine old chestnut, that. Everybody's born, not made.

THE DOCTOR. Youre getting almost clever. I dont like it: youre not yourself today. I wish I could take your mind off your troubles. Suppose you try a little music.

REGINALD. I cant play. My fingers wont obey me. And Jf cant stand the sound of the piano. I sounded a note this morning; and it made me scream.

THE DOCTOR. But why not get somebody to play to you?

REGINALD. Whom could I get, even if I could bear it? You cant play.

THE DOCTOR. Well : I'm not the only person in the world.

REGINALD. If you bring anyone else in here, I shall go mad. I'll throw myself out of the window. I cant bear the idea of music. I dread it, hate it, loathe it.

THE DOCTOR. Thats very serious, you know.

REGINALD. Why is it serious?

THE DOCTOR. Well, what would become of you without your turn for music? You have absolutely no capacity in any other directioft.

REGINALD. I'm in Parliament. And I'm an under-secretary.

THE DOCTOR. Thats because your father is a Duke. If you were in a Republic you wouldnt be trusted to clean boots, unless your father was a millionaire. No, Reginald: the day you give up vamping accompaniments and playing the latest ragtimes by ear, youre a lost man socially.

REGINALD [deprecating] Oh, I say!

THE DOCTOR [rising] However, perhaps it's too soon for you to try the music-cure yet. It was your mother's idea; but I'll call and tell her to wait a day or two. I think she meant to send somebody to play. I must be off now. Look in again later. Meanwhile, sleep as much as you can. Or you might read a little.

REGINALD. What can I read?

THE DOCTOR. Try the Strand Magazine.

REGINALD. But it's so frightfully intellectual. It would overtax my brain.

THE DOCTOR. Oh, well, I suppose it would. Well, sleep. Perhaps I'd better give you something to send you off [he produces a medicine case].

REGINALD. Whats this? Veronal?

THE DOCTOR. Dont be alarmed. Only the old-fashioned remedy: opium. Take this [Reginald fakes a pill]: that will do the trick, I expect. If you find after half an hour that it has only excited you, take another. I'll leave one for you [he puts one on the plate, and pockets his medicine case].

REGINALD. Better leave me a lot. I like pills.

THE DOCTOR. Thank you: I'm not treating you with a view to a coroner's inquest. You know, dont you, that opium is a poison?

REGINALD. Yes, opium. But not pills.

THE DOCTOR. Well, Heaven forbid that I, a doctor, should shake anybody's faith in pills. But I shant leave you enough to kill you. [He puts on his hat].

REGINALD. Youll tell them, wont you, not to let anyone in. Really and truly I shall throw myself out of the window if any stranger comes in. I should go out of my mind.

THE DOCTOR. None of us have very far to go to do that, my young friend. Ta ta, for the moment [he makes for the central doors].

REGINALD. You cant go out that way. I made my mother lock it and take away the key. I felt sure theyd let somebody in that way if she didnt. Youll have to go the way you came.

THE DOCTOR [returning Right. Now let me see you settle down before I go. I want you to be asleep before I leave the room.

Reginald settles himself to sleep with his face to the back of the sofa. The doctor goes softly to the side door and goes out.

REGINALD [sitting up wildly and staring affrightedly at the piano] Doctor! Doctor! Help!!!

THE DOCTOR [returning hastily] What is it?

REGINALD [after another doubtful look at the piano] Nothing. [He composes himself to sleep again].

THE DOCTOR. Nothing! There must have been something or you wouldnt have yelled like that. [Pulling Reginald over so as to see his face] Here! what was it?

REGINALD. Well, it's gone.

THE DOCTOR. Whats gone?

REGINALD. The crocodile.

THE DOCTOR. The crocodile!

REGINALD. Yes. It laughed at me, and was going to play the piano with its tail.

THE DOCTOR. Opium in small doses doesnt agree with you, my young friend. [Taking the spare pill from the plate] I shall have to give you a second pill.

REGINALD. But suppose two crocodiles come!

THE DOCTOR. They wont. If anything comes it will be something pretty this time. Thats how opium acts. Anyhow, youll be fast asleep in ten minutes. Here. Take it.

REGINALD [after taking the pill\ It was awfully silly of me. But you know I really saw the thing.

THE DOCTOR. You neednt trouble about what you see with your eyes shut. [He turns to the door].

REGINALD. Would you mind looking under the sofa to make sure the crocodile isnt there?

THE DOCTOR. Why not look yourself? that would be more convincing.

REGINALD. I darent.

THE DOCTOR. You duffer! [He looks]. All serene. No crocodile. Now go bye bye. [He goes out].

Reginald again composes himself to sleep. Somebody unlocks the central doors. A lovely lady enters with a bouquet in her hand. She looks about her; takes a letter from wherever she carries letters; and starts on a voyage of discovery round the room, checking her observations by the contents of the letter. The piano seems specially satisfactory: she nods as she sees it. Reginald seems also to be quite expected. She does not speak to him. When she is quite satisfied that she is in the right room 9 she goes to the piano and tantalizes the expectant audience for about two minutes by putting down her flowers on the candle-stand; taking off her gloves and putting them with the flowers; taking of half a dozen diamond rings in the same way; sitting down to the keyboard and finding it too near to the piano, then too far, then too high, then too low: in short, exhausting all the tricks of the professional pianist before she at last strikes the keys and preludes brilliantly. At the sound, Reginald, with a scream, rolls from the sofa and writhes on the carpet in horrible contortions. She stops playing, amazed.

REGINALD. Oh! Oh! Oh! The crocodiles! Stop! Ow! Oh! [He looks at the piano and sees the lady] Oh I say!

THE LADY. What on earth do you mean by making that noise when I'm playing? Have you no sense? Have you no manners?

REGINALD [sitting on the floor] I'm awfully sorry.

THE LADY. Sorry! Why did you do it?

REGINALD. I thought you were a crocodile.

THE LADY. What a silly thing to say! Do I look like a crocodile?

REGINALD. No.

THE LADY. Do I play like a crocodile!

REGINALD [cautiously rising and approaching her] Well, you know, it's so hard to know how a crocodile would play.

THE LADY. Stuff! [She resumes her playing],

REGINALD. Please! [He stops her by shutting the keyboard lid.] Who let you in?

THE LADY [rising threateningly] What is that to you, pray?

REGINALD [retreating timidly] It's my room, you know.

THE LADY. It's nothing of the sort. It's the Duchess of Dunmow's room. I know it's the right one, because she gave me the key; and it was the right key.

REGINALD. But what did she do that for? Who are you, if you don't mind my asking?

THE LADY. I do mind your asking. It's no business of yours. However, you'd better know to whom you are speaking. I am Strega Thundridge. [She pronounces it Stray ga].

REGINALD, What! The female Paderewski!

STREGA. Pardon me. I believe Mr Paderewski has been called the male Thundridge; but no gentleman would dream of repeating such offensive vulgarities. Will you be good enough to return to your sofa, and hold your tongue, or else leave the room.

REGINALD. But, you know, I am ill.

STREGA. Then go to bed, and send for a doctor. [She sits down again to the keyboard.]

REGINALD [falling on his knees] You mustn't play. You really mustn't. I can't stand it. I shall simply not be myself if you start playing.

STREGA [raising the lid] Then I shall start at once.

REGINALD [running to her on his knees and snatching at her hands] No, you shan't. [She rises indignantly. He holds on to her hands, but exclaims ecstatically] Oh, I say, what lovely hands you've got!

STREGA. The idea! [She hurls him to the carpet].

REGINALD [on the floor staring at her] You are strong.

STREGA. My strength has been developed by playing left hand octave passages like this. [She begins playing Liszt's transcription of Schubert's ErlKönig].

REGINALD [puts his fingers in his ears, but continues to stare at her].

STREGA [stopping] I really cannot play if you keep your ears stopped. It is an insult. Leave the room.

REGINALD. But I tell you it's my room.

STREGA [rising] Leave the room, or I will ring your bell and have you put out. [She goes to the little table, and poises her fingers over the bell call].

REGINALD [rushing to her] No no: somebody will come if you ring; and I shall go distracted if a stranger comes in. [With a touch of her left hand she sends him reeling. He appeals to her plaintively] Don't you see that I am ill?

STREGA. I see that you are mentally afflicted. But that doesn't matter to me. The Duchess of Dunmow has engaged me to come to this room and play for two hours. I never break an engagement, especially a two hundred and fifty guinea one. [She turns towards the piano].

REGINALD. But didn't she tell you anything about me?

STREGA [turning back to him] She said there would be a foolish young man in the room, but that I was not to mind him. She assured me you were not dangerous except to yourself [Collaring him and holding him bent backwards over the piano]. But I will have no nonsense about not listening. All the world listens when I play. Listen, or go.

REGINALD [helpless] But I shall have to sit on the stairs. I don't dare go into any of the rooms: I should meet people there.

STREGA, You will meet plenty of people on the stairs, young man. They are sitting six on each stair, not counting those who are sitting astride the banisters on the chance of hearing me play.

REGINALD. How dreadful! [Tearfully] You've no right to bully me like this. I'm ill: I can't bear it. I'll throw myself out of the window.

STREGA [releasing him] Do. What an advertisement! It will be really kind of you. [She goes back to the keyboard and sits down to play].

REGINALD [crossing to the window] You'll be sorry you were so unfeeling when you see my mangled body. [He opens the window; looks out; shuts it hastily and retreats with a scream.] There's a crowd. I don't dare.

STREGA [pleased] Waiting to hear me play [she preludes softly].

REGINALD [ravished] Oh! I can stand that, you know.

STREGA [ironically, still preluding] Thank you.

REGINALD. The fact is, I can play a bit myself.

STREGA [still preluding] An amateur, I presume.

REGINALD. I have often been told I could make a living at it if I tried. But of course it wouldnt do for a man in my position to lower himself by becoming a professional.

STREGA [abruptly ceasing to play] Tactful, that, I dont think! And what do you play, may I ask?

REGINALD. Oh, all the very best music.

STREGA. For instance?

REGINALD. I wish you belonged to me.

STREGA [rising outraged] You young blackguard! How dare you?

REGINALD. You dont understand: it's the name of a tune. Let me play it for you. [He sits down at the keyboard] I Don't think you believe I can play.

STREGA. Pardon me. I have heard a horse play the harmonium at a music hall. I can believe anything.

REGINALD. Aha! [He plays]. Do you like that?

STREGA. What is it? Is it intended for music?

REGINALD. Oh, you beautiful doll.

STREGA. Take that [she knocks him sprawling over the keyboard.] Beautiful doll indeed!

REGINALD. Oh, I say! Look here: thats the name of the tune too. You seem quite ignorant of the best music. Dont you know Rum Turn Tiddle, and Alexander's Rag Time Band, and Take me back to the Garden of Love, and Everybody likes our Mary.

STREGA. Young man: I have never even heard of these abominations. I am now going to educate you musically. I am going to play Chopin, and Brahms, and Bach, and Schumann, and...

REGINALD [horrified] You dont mean classical music?

STREGA. I do [He bolts through the central doors. Disgusted] Pig! [She sits down at the piano again].

REGINALD [rushing back into the room] I forgot the people on the stairs: crowds of them. Oh, what shall I do! Oh dont, Dont, DONT play classical music to me. Say you wont. Please. [She looks at him enigmatically and softly plays a Liebes-Heder waltz] Oh, I say: thats rather pretty.

STREGA. Like it?

REGINALD. Awfully. Oh, I say, you know: I really do wish you belonged to me. [Strega suddenly plays a violent Chopin study. He goes into convulsions]. Oh! Stop! Mercy! Help! Oh please, please!

STREGA [pausing with her hands raised over the keyboard^ ready to pounce on the chords] Will you ever say that again?

REGINALD. Never. I beg your pardon.

STREGA [satisfied] Hm! [She drops her hands In her lap].

REGINALD [wiping his brow] Oh, that was fearfully classical.

STREGA. You want your back stiffened a little, my young friend. Besides, I really cannot earn two hundred and fifty guineas by playing soothing syrup to you. Now prepare for the worst. I'm going to make a man of you.

REGINALD. How?

STREGA. With Chopin's Polonaise in A Flat. Now. Imagine yourself going into battle. [He runs away as before]. Goose!

REGINALD [returning as before] The crowd is worse than ever. Have you no pity?

STREGA. Come here. Dont imagine yourself going into battle. Imagine that you have just been in a battle; and that you have saved your country by deeds of splendid bravery; and that you are going to dance with beautiful women who are proud of you. Can you imagine that?

REGINALD. Rathe-e-e-errr. Thats how I always do imagine myself.

STREGA. Right. Now listen. [She plays the first section of the Polonaise. Reginald flinches at first, but gradually braces himself; stiffens; struts; throws up his head and slaps his chest]. Thats better. What a hero! [After a difficult passage]. Takes a bit of doing, that, dearest child. [Coming to the chords which announce the middle section] Now for it.

REGINALD [unable to contain himself] Oh, this is too glorious. I must have a turn or I shall forget myself.

STREGA. Can you play this? Nothing but this. [She plays the octave passage in the bass].

REGINALD. Just riddle riddle, riddle tiddle, riddle riddle, riddle tiddle? Nothing but that?

STREGA. Very softly at first. Like the ticking of a watch. Then louder and louder, as you feel my soul swelling.

REGINALD. I understand. Just give me those chords again to buck me up to it. [She plays the chords again. He plays the octave passages; and they play the middle section as a duet. At the repeat he cries] Again! again!

STREGA. It's meant to be played again. Now.

They repeat it. At the end of the section she pushes him off the bench on to the floor,, and goes on with

the Polonaise alone.

REGINALD. Wonderful woman: I have a confession to make, a confidence to impart. Your playing draws it from me. Listen, Strega [she plays a horrible discord\ I mean Miss Thundridge.

STREGA. Thats better; but I prefer Wonderful Woman.

REGINALD. You are a wonderful woman, you know. Adored one would you mind my taking a little valerian? I'm so excited [he takes some]. A a ah! Now I feel that I can speak. Listen to me, goddess. I am not happy. I hate my present existence. I loathe parliament. I am not fit for public affairs. I am condemned to live at home with five coarse and brutal sisters who care for nothing but Alpine climbing, and looping the loop on aeroplanes, and going on deputations, and fighting the police. Do you know what they call me?

STREGA [playing softly] What do they call you, dear?

REGINALD. They call me a Clinger. Well, I confess it. I am a Clinger. I am not fit to be thrown unprotected upon the world. I want to be shielded. I want a strong arm to lean on, a dauntless heart to be gathered to and cherished, a breadwinner on whose income I can live without the sordid horrors of having to make money for myself. I am a poor little thing, I know, Strega; but I could make a home for you. I have great taste in carpets and pictures. I can cook like anything. I can play quite nicely after dinner. Though you mightnt think it, I can be quite stern and strongminded with servants. I get on splendidly with children: they never talk over my head as grown-up people do. I have a real genius for home life. And I shouldnt at all mind being tyrannized over a little: in fact, I like it. It saves me the trouble of having to think what to do. Oh, Strega, dont you want a dear little domesticated husband who would have no concern but to please you, no thought outside our home, who would be unspotted and unsoiled by the rude cold world, who would never meddle in politics or annoy you by interfering with your profession? Is there any hope for me?

STREGA [coming away from the piano] My child: I am a hard, strong, independent, muscular woman. How can you, with your delicate soft nature, see anything to love in me? I should hurt you, shock you, perhaps yes: let me confess it I have a violent temper, and might even,, in a transport of rage, beat you.

REGINALD. Oh do, do. Dont laugh at this ridiculous confession; but ever since I was a child I have had only one secret longing, and that was to be mercilessly beaten by a splendid, strong, beautiful woman.

STREGA [solemnly] Reginald I think your mother spoke of you as Reginald?

REGINALD. Reggie.

STREGA. I too have a confession to make. I too need some music to speak through. Will you be so good?

REGINALD. Angel. [He rushes to the piano and plays sympathetically whilst she speaks].

STREGA. I, too, have had my dream. It has consoled me through the weary hours when I practiced scales for eight hours a day. It has pursued me through the applause of admiring thousands in Europe and America. It is a dream of a timid little heart fluttering against mine, of a gentle voice to welcome

me home, of a silky moustache to kiss my weary fingers when I return from a Titanic struggle with Tchaikovsky's Concerto in G major, of somebody utterly dependent on me, utterly devoted to me, utterly my own, living only to be cherished and worshipped by me.

REGINALD. But you would be angry sometimes: terrible, splendid, ruthless, violent. You would throw down the thing you loved and trample on it as it clung to your feet.

STREGA. Yes oh, why do you force me to confess it? I should beat it to a jelly, and then cast myself in transports of remorse on its quivering frame and smother it with passionate kisses.

REGINALD [transported] Let it be me, let it be me.

STREGA. You dare face this terrible destiny?

REGINALD. I embrace it. I adore you. I am wholly yours. Oh, let me cling, cling, cling.

STREGA [embracing him fiercely] Nothing shall tear you from my arms now.

REGINALD. Nothing. I am provided for. Oh how happy this will make my mother!

STREGA. Sweet: name the day.

He plays a wedding march. She plays the bass.

AYOT ST LAWRENCE, list January 1914.